

# Expressing and Storing Breast Milk

At Home and in the Hospital



Peninsula  
Health

The best way to remove milk from your breasts is by breastfeeding. **However**, there may be occasions when this is not possible, and you wish or need to express your breast milk.

Reasons may include:

- your baby has not yet established breastfeeding
- your baby is too unwell to breastfeed
- your baby is premature and unable to suck well
- your baby is hospitalised and you cannot be there for every feed
- you are trying to increase your breast milk supply
- to assist in the healing of sore nipples
- relieving breast fullness and discomfort
- blocked ducts and mastitis
- you are returning to work or have other commitments
- any time your baby cannot be with you for every feed

There are three methods of expressing your milk:

- **Hand expressing**
- **Manual pumping**
- **Electric pumping**

If expressed breast milk is supplying your baby's full nutritional requirements, then you will need to express as often as your baby would feed. This could be **8-12 times per day**, including at least one expression overnight.

The more milk you take out of your breasts, the more milk you will make, however, the volume of breast milk expressed is not a reliable indicator of supply. You may find volumes expressed vary throughout the day and night and can vary widely between individuals.

If you have concerns about your breast milk supply, please refer to the Additional Support section at the end of this brochure.

## Hand Expressing

- Is the most effective way to express in the first few days, where small yellow-coloured amounts are common
- Does not need any special equipment
- Takes practice to find the correct technique

Have someone show you how to do this correctly; if that is not possible, refer to the photos for the basics.



Sitting up and leaning forward, apply your thumb 2-3cms above your nipple and your fingers 2-3cms below it. Gently compress your breast between your thumb and fingers, coming behind the nipple and towards the chest.



It may take a few repetitions to begin getting some breast milk. It may take a few different positions to get the hand position that is effective for you.

## Cleaning Equipment and Containers

All containers and breast pump parts used to collect and store breast milk must be carefully cleaned after use. They should not be placed directly into the sink but in a clean bowl or container in the sink. We can provide you with expressing equipment while in the hospital. Be sure to ask your Midwife/Nurse how to clean the specific type you are provided with.

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Dry your hands on something clean such as a clean paper or cloth towel.
- Separate all parts of the breast pump and rinse in cold water to remove milk from all surfaces (do not wash the long plastic tubing).
- Completely remove all traces of milk with a small amount of dishwashing liquid and hot water. Use a brush dedicated for this purpose.
- Rinse at least twice in hot water.
- Drain on clean paper or cloth towel and allow to air dry completely before storing.
- Seal the dry parts in a new plastic bag or clean container until next use.

## Newborns in Special Care Nursery

As extra protection for your baby, we suggest additionally sterilising your breast pump parts once a day.

### **Boiling:**

- Cover the parts with water, eliminating all bubbles.
- Bring to the boil and boil for 5 minutes.
- Allow to cool in the saucepan before removing. Take care to avoid burns.

### **Steam Sterilisers:**

- Follow the specific instructions for each unit.
- Be aware that not all breast pump parts can be put into microwave sterilisers – they may melt.

## Storage of Breast Milk

There are many containers that can be used to store breast milk:

- Sterile syringes with caps for small breast milk volumes
- Small sterile bags specially designed for storing breast milk are available from pharmacies, baby goods shops and supermarkets
- Baby feeding bottles with solid lids
- Clean food storage containers with tight-fitting lids
- Small glass baby food jars
- Clean plastic ice cube trays with lids

If you are collecting breast milk for your baby in the Special Care Nursery, you may use the sterile containers supplied on the ward.

## Breast Milk Labelling Requirements

**Label all breast milk with your baby's full name, the date and the time expressed immediately.**

In the hospital, your Midwife/Nurse will supply you with hospital labels with your baby's full name, hospital number, date of birth and home address. They will check with you that you are receiving the correct labels. Immediately label and safely store your expressed breast milk. Prior to storing your breast milk in one of the hospitals dedicated breast milk fridges, staff will check the labelling of your breast milk with you at the cot side. Before your baby receives your expressed breast milk, the details on the label will be compared to your baby's hospital ID band. This will be done with a parent and Midwife/Nurse or by two staff members and co-signed on your baby's feeding chart every feed.

If there are any babies with similar first and/or last name to your baby, your Midwife/Nurse will affix a "Similar Name" label on your expressed milk prior to storage. For example, expressed breast milk for twins **must** have **both** babies' labels on each container as well as a "Similar Name" label.

**Breast milk can be stored in the refrigerator for a maximum of 72 hours. If it is not going to be used in that time, freeze it for later use.**

<b>Breast Milk</b>	<b>Room Temperature</b>	<b>Refrigerator</b>	<b>Freezer</b>
<b>Freshly expressed into a closed container</b>	6–8 hrs (26°C or lower). If refrigeration is available, store milk there	No more than 72 hours. Store in back, where it is coldest	2 weeks in freezer compartment inside refrigerator (-15°C)  3 months in freezer section of refrigerator with separate door (-18°C)  6–12 months in deep freeze (-20°C)
<b>Previously frozen – thawed in refrigerator but not warmed</b>	4 hours or less (ie the next feeding)	Store in refrigerator 24 hours	Do not refreeze
<b>Thawed outside refrigerator in warm water</b>	For completion of feeding	Hold for 4 hours or until next feeding	Do not refreeze
<b>Infant has begun feeding</b>	For completion of feeding then discard	Discard	Discard

*(National Health and Medical Research Council 2012, Infant Feeding Guidelines)*

## Thawing and Warming Breastmilk

Expressed breast milk will separate into layers. This is normal, simply swirl the container gently prior to use. Variations in colour are also normal.

### Thawing

- Thaw breast milk by placing directly into the refrigerator or by submerging it in cool water and then refrigerating for up to 24 hours
- Do not leave it to stand at room temperature
- Never refreeze any previously thawed breast milk

### Warming

- Warm breast milk to body temperature by submerging in a jug of hot water
- Warmed breast milk should be given within 1 hour, and any leftover from this feed should be discarded
- **Do not thaw or warm any milk** in the microwave as it may cause ‘hot spots’ and risk burns to the baby. Research suggests it can also damage the quality of the breast milk.

## Transporting Breast Milk

- Transport milk in an insulated container with a freezer brick inside
- If milk is frozen, it must not be allowed to thaw
- If any milk thaws, it must be used within 24 hours

## Breast Pumps

There may be times when using a breast pump is more practical than hand expressing. If using a breast pump in the first 3-4 days post birth, it is common that no milk is expressed at all, however, the pumping action is still stimulating your supply. Finish off your pumping session with hand expressing. Once your milk comes in, it is ideal that you continue to hand express after pumping for additional milk extraction and stimulation. You may find that massaging your breasts while pumping helps stimulate breast milk flow.

## Additional Support

If you have questions about purchasing or hiring a breast pump, or any other topics covered in this brochure, contact your Midwife, Maternal and Child Health Nurse, or the Australian Breastfeeding Association on their 24hr helpline – 1800 686 268 or [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)

Peninsula Health's **Breastfeeding Support Service** offers free outpatient appointments at Frankston Hospital and Hastings Community Health by calling (03) 9784 2600.

peninsulahealth.org.au



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is intended to support, not replace, discussion with your  
doctor or health care professionals.

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