

# Expressing and Storing Breastmilk

## References

Visit [www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/expressing-storing](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/expressing-storing) to view reference sources.

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The Breastfeeding Network is an independent voluntary organisation offering support and information to breastfeeding women and those involved in their care.



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PO Box 11126 Paisley PA2 8YB

## National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212

Open 9.30am-9.30pm 365 days a year.

The National Breastfeeding Helpline is run by the Breastfeeding Network and the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers.  
Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package.

For details of the main UK breast pump hire companies, please visit:

[www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/expressing-storing](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/expressing-storing)

## Safe Storage

The lower the temperature, the longer the storage:

- You can store your breastmilk in the fridge for up to 3 days where you don't know the exact temperature, (assume it runs between 5-10°C).
- Breastmilk can be stored for 5 days in a fridge running at 4°C or lower. \*One study has shown fresh breastmilk can be used for up to 8 days when the fridge temperature is kept stable at 4°C or below.
- If the fridge temperature goes above 4°C during this time, use your milk within 6 hours or throw away.
- If you don't have a fridge running at 4°C and you want to keep your milk cooler use a cool bag or box with deep frozen ice packs (changed every 24 hours). Protect your milk from direct contact with the ice packs or it may freeze – try wrapping the ice packs in kitchen towel. The bag can also be used to carry milk.
- The storage temperatures given here include a degree of caution so that your milk remains safe for your baby.
- If you wish to store your breastmilk for longer than 5 days, freeze as soon as you can after expressing.
- If taking colostrum or milk into hospital follow their storage and transport times.

## Using stored breastmilk

- Ideally, defrost frozen breastmilk in the fridge. If needed quickly, try defrosting under cool, then warm, running water. Dry the outside of the container with kitchen paper before use.
- Consider using stored breastmilk straight from the fridge to avoid the risks of overheating and scalds. Do not heat in a microwave.
- Use defrosted breastmilk immediately and throw away any unused milk.
- If the milk smells sour DO NOT USE.
- When stored, the cream and milk may separate out. This is normal. Shake gently to mix before use.
- Some babies are reluctant to take expressed breastmilk, particularly at first. Try offering milk from a cup or spoon. They may be less reluctant when someone else gives it. If expressed milk is refused try not to worry - your baby will make up any missed feeds by breastfeeding more often or for longer on your return.

## Safe Storage of breastmilk in the home

MILK	PLACE	MAXIMUM TIME
Fresh breastmilk including colostrum	Normal room temperature	6 hours
	Fridge: 5 to 10°C	3 days
	Fridge: 4°C or lower	5 days*
(*if temperature rises above 4°C after 3 days, use within 6 hours or throw away)		
Frozen breastmilk	Freezer: -18°C or lower	6 months
Defrosting breastmilk	When defrosting in fridge	Usually takes 12 hours to defrost, then use as soon as fully defrosted
	When defrosting milk outside fridge	Use as soon as fully defrosted

Milk can be transported within the safe storage times, provided storage temperatures are maintained. Previously frozen milk must be used immediately when fully defrosted.  
Fresh milk can be transported within 24 hours, provided fridge temperatures are maintained using an insulated box & deep frozen ice-packs, and total storage & transportation times do not exceed the recommended storage times. If no ice-packs are used when transporting, use within 4 hours.

**REMEMBER:** The more often the fridge door is opened, the more likely the temperature will rise. Try to check the temperature of every fridge (or cool bag) used for storing your milk each time you use it. If the fridge has no built in thermometer, use a fridge thermometer from kitchenware stores.

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National Breastfeeding Helpline  
0300 100 0121  
9.30am-9.30pm, 7 days a week

“I was determined my baby would still have my breastmilk when I returned to work but was terrified I wouldn't be able to express enough and struggled to stockpile small quantities. Once I started work, I found I needn't have worried or banked as much milk but was still confused how best to store it.”

# Expressing and Storing Breastmilk

## Hand Expressing

- Once your milk is flowing, you will need a wide mouthed container like a sterile plastic pot or container that is well-cleaned and scalded with boiling water - a jug is ideal – so get this ready before you start.
- Remember to wash your hands first.
- Sit somewhere comfortable.
- To help your milk to flow (let down) you might:
  - Relax with a warm drink, music or TV.
  - Have your baby close, or look at a photograph, clothing or toy to remind you of your baby.
  - Warm your breasts in a bath, shower or using warm flannels and practice expressing.
- Try some ways to gently massage your whole breast, working from the outside toward your nipple. Take care not to drag your skin:
  - Stroke with your fingertips
  - Roll using your knuckles.
  - Try using circular movements

Make a 'C' shape by placing your thumb above and your fingers below your breast near the edge of the areola (the dark skin) but away from your nipple.



- Gently press your thumb and fingers together, release your fingers and repeat in a rhythmic movement.
- Sometimes pressing inwards back towards your chest wall as you squeeze helps. You may need to experiment with how far back from your nipple to squeeze - everyone is slightly different.
- When the milk flow slows, re-position your fingers and thumb (as if moving them around a clock face), then express another area of your breast.
- Try to express all areas of your breast and alternate between breasts.

**REMEMBER:** When you first start to express it is common to get only a few drops of milk. As with breastfeeding, the more you practice, the easier it gets. Expressing at a different time of day may work better for you.

## When might I need to express?

- **Before your baby is born** – you may be advised that your baby might need extra milk when they are born. You can express and store your first milk (colostrum) from 37 weeks gestation.
- **In the first few days** - if your baby is sleepy, or to help them attach and feed.

For both these stages your midwife will give you small oral syringes to collect your milk. These are usually 1ml to begin with.

Use the ideas in this leaflet to discover what works for you. Colostrum usually starts in tiny droplets and is often sticky - having help to collect these drops in the syringe can be useful.

- Aim to express twice a day from 36-37 weeks for no more than 10 minutes, freezing the same day.
- Once your baby is born, express as needed aiming to stimulate your breasts at least 8 times a day including once overnight through direct breastfeeding or expressing as this will increase your milk supply to meet your baby's needs and can help you feel more comfortable.

## Good Hygiene

- Always wash your hands before expressing and handling breastmilk and ask others giving expressed milk to do the same.
- Always use a sterile container with a lid, not the collection jug, to store your breastmilk. You can buy disposable containers. Take care with plastic bags that can puncture easily.
- Try to use a different storage container each time you collect milk. If necessary, newly collected milk may be cooled and added to previously stored milk on the same day only.
- Label the storage containers or syringes with your name, breastmilk, time and date and put inside a clean sealed bag or box before storing. Name and date the bag too.
- Store your breastmilk in the fridge or freezer as soon as possible.
- Store away from meat products, eggs or any uncooked foods. Store at the back of the fridge and not in the door.

**IMPORTANT:** If you have further questions on expressing or breastfeeding, do contact your midwife, health visitor or breastfeeding supporter for help and support.

This page can be removed from the leaflet and displayed on your fridge, kept with you or given to your baby's carer.

If your baby has been ill or was born prematurely please check with your health professional that the storage times apply.

## Your breastmilk:

- Can be expressed by hand, by hand pump or by electric pump. Once you know how, hand expressing is easy and needs little equipment.
- Contains anti-infective ingredients that limit the growth of unwanted bacteria.
- Should still be handled and stored carefully to stop unwanted bacteria from getting into your milk and growing.
- Stays at the highest quality when stored in a fridge, particularly when running at 4°C or below. *Note: some fridges run higher at 5-10°C - if you don't know the temperature of your fridge assume it is running at this higher temperature.*
- Can be frozen, which affects some (but by no means all) of the nutrients and anti-infective ingredients of breastmilk.

This leaflet gives you a few tips on how to hand express and store your breastmilk. You might be considering expressing small amounts of colostrum just before or after your baby is born. You may be thinking about returning to work or study, or planning a night out. Expressing can also help relieve pressure from a blocked duct or mastitis.

**IMPORTANT:** If your baby has been ill or was born prematurely please discuss this leaflet with your health professional to check that the storage times apply. This is especially important if you are bringing your colostrum or milk into hospital for your baby.



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