

Hand Expression of Breast Milk

Patient Information
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You may want to hand express breast milk

- If you are separated from your baby.
- When you are helping your baby learn to breastfeed.
- To relieve full breasts so your baby can latch easier.
- If your nipples are sore.
- In combination with pumping to increase the amount of milk you get.

Getting started

- Wash your hands with soap and water and get comfortable.
- Have a clean cup, bowl, or jar ready to catch the milk.
- Gently massage your breast in a circular motion, working from shoulder to nipple.



- To start the let-down reflex, roll your nipple between your thumb and finger.
- Put your hand in a C-shape on your breast. Put fingers on the bottom and your thumb on the

top at the outer edge of the areola.



- Gently push your thumb and fingers back towards your chest, then squeeze them together while you move them towards the nipple, but do not pinch your nipple.
- Move your fingers around the areola in a circle to express from different parts of your breast. Press and release, repeat the movement on your breast, and switch between breasts every few minutes.
- Express until no more milk comes out, at least 10 to 15 minutes each breast.

If you know you will need to express your breast milk, start to express by hand as soon after birth as possible. Try to do this in the first 1 to 6 hours. The sooner the better.

Express milk about every 3 hours if your baby is unable to nurse 8 or more times in 24 hours.

Tips to help your milk 'let down'

- Express in a quiet place and try to relax.
- If you are able, cuddle your baby skin to skin first. The sight and smell of your baby helps, so if you are separated, have baby items nearby (picture, clothing).
- Warmth can help – apply warm compresses or take a bath or shower before expressing.

It takes a little practice

The first few times you may not get very much milk and it may take you up to 45 minutes to express both breasts. After some practice you will be finished in a shorter time.

Even a few drops of milk in the beginning is ideal food for your baby. Your nurse will show you how you can give your baby the milk you have expressed.

Video: We recommend you watch 'Hand Expression' by the UK Baby Friendly Initiative at: www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expressing

Reference:

Baby's Best Chance – Parent's Handbook of Pregnancy and Baby Care (2011).

Healthlink BC

Dial 8-1-1

Talk to a Nurse 24 hours/day, 7 days/week
Pharmacist available between 5 p.m. - 9 a.m. daily
Dietitian between 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. - Monday to Friday
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