Breastfeeding for the Mother
Having Surgery

Breastfeeding can continue even if you need to have an operation. Here are some things to think about as you plan to interrupt breastfeeding as little as possible.

Planning Ahead

- Let your doctor and other health care providers know that you plan to continue to breastfeed your baby around the time of your surgery and afterward.
- Find out how long your procedure or surgery will take.
- Discuss recovery time and pain-control issues. It is possible that the length of your surgery could mean you will miss one or more of your baby’s feedings.
- Ask about what movement restrictions you may have after your surgery.
- If you have special concerns about breastfeeding, please talk with one of the lactation consultants at 206-598-4628.
- Make sure your family and friends know that you will continue to breastfeed after your operation. Ask them to help with baby care during your recovery at the hospital and when you go home.

Our policy at University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC) is to encourage you to have your baby stay in your room with you and be there with you as much as possible. You will need another adult to care for your baby in your room so that you will be free to recover and rest without the responsibility of baby care.

Plan to pump enough milk for at least 1 or 2 feedings. Store it in the refrigerator or freezer for the day of your surgery. You may not need to use this milk, but you will probably feel more comfortable knowing it is there if you do need it.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Lactation Services: 206-598-4628

Weekdays: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Weekends and holidays: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For most women, the best time to pump extra milk is right after breastfeeding. You may find it helpful to do 1 or 2 pumping sessions for a few days to collect enough milk. Store it for up to 8 days in the refrigerator and up to 6 months in a freezer that is cold enough to freeze ice cream solid.

If you are concerned about whether your baby will take a bottle, call a lactation consultant at 206-598-4628.

Anesthesia and Medicines

Breastfeeding mothers may be concerned about the medicines that are given before, during, and after surgery. Many drug manufacturers say to throw away your milk for 24 hours following surgery, but we now know that very little of these medicines enters the milk, and even less is absorbed by the baby. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics approves many of the medicines normally used with surgery for breastfeeding mothers. So, it is usually not necessary to pump and throw away any of your milk.

The Day of Surgery

You will need to plan on feeding your baby or pumping your breasts as close to the time of surgery as possible. This will help keep your breasts from becoming overly full during surgery.

You will also need to empty your breasts after your surgery. We encourage you to breastfeed at this time rather than use a pump. If you are unable to breastfeed after your surgery, plan on using an electric pump for 10 to 15 minutes at normal feeding times until you and your baby are reunited. While you are in the hospital, your nurse can order a double electric pump for you to use before or after your surgery. It can be ready within about an hour’s notice. Or, you can bring your own pump from home, if you have one.

If you have any questions or concerns about breastfeeding or pumping during this time, you or your nurse can call a lactation consultant at 206-598-4628.