

Pumping and Storing Breast Milk

If you are having challenges with breastfeeding, or you need to be away from your baby for more than a few hours, you can feed your baby breast milk with the help of a good breast pump. Read about how using a breast pump can help, what to expect when pumping, how often you should pump, and how to choose a breast pump.

Why should I use a breast pump?

When breastfeeding is going well, there is usually no need to pump your milk. In fact, we know that breastfeeding gets off to the best start when babies are fed only at the breast for the first month or more.

During these first weeks, your baby will learn to latch on to your breast and take the amount of milk needed for each feeding. Your breasts respond by refilling and producing the right amount of milk based on how much your baby drinks. Your milk supply adjusts to meet your baby's demands.

Once you are sure that your baby is latching easily, nursing well, and gaining weight, you may choose to pump for a bottle once in a while. Pumping is also a great choice for working mothers who are away from their babies. Many women keep making all the milk their babies need for many months, even with a busy schedule.

There are also other reasons for pumping. It is very important to ask for help and start pumping if:

- Your baby has lost more than 10% from birth weight
- You have a low milk supply
- Nipple or breast pain interrupts breastfeeding
- Your baby is preterm or in the hospital
- Your baby cannot breastfeed



A breast pump will help you collect your breast milk quickly and easily.

Talk with a lactation consultant if you have any concerns or questions about pumping and storing breast milk: 206.598.4628

What should I expect to see when I pump?

As your nipple and surrounding breast are gently pulled into the plastic breast pump, you will probably see milk drip from several *ducts* (small openings) in your nipple. A *hormone* (a natural substance inside your body) is released early in a pumping session. The hormone *oxytocin* causes the let-down reflex to allow milk to spray from the ducts.

Some women describe a tingling feeling with let-down. The milk looks white, and sometimes a little watery at the beginning. It looks thicker by the end of the session. It looks different from the clear or yellow colostrum you may have seen in the first days after your baby was born. It is all good milk. Sometimes one breast produces more milk than the other breast. Usually this is not a problem.

How often should I pump?

To keep up your full milk supply when you are away from your baby, plan on pumping around your baby's usual feeding times. Pumping tells your breasts to make the amount of milk your baby needs. Your breasts will start to make less milk if they remain "full" for too long. This is why you should try **not** to go more than 4 hours between feedings or pumping sessions in the first 1 or 2 months.

Most women find that 10 to 15 minutes of double pumping will "empty" their breasts. If you are using a single pump, it could take 15 minutes or longer for each side.

How should I store breast milk? How long does it keep? Can I freeze it?

- When you have just expressed your milk and you are going to feed it to your baby within 4 hours, you can leave the breast milk out of the refrigerator, if the room is cooler than 77°F (25°C).
- If you will be using the milk within a week, you can store it in a glass or plastic container in the refrigerator.
- You can store breast milk for 3 to 6 months in a freezer that freezes ice cream solid, or up to 12 months in a deep freeze (-4°F or -20°C).
- Milk can be frozen in glass or plastic containers. If you use plastic bottles or bags, protect them from punctures. Allow room in the containers for the milk to expand as it freezes.

How should I thaw frozen breast milk?

- Thaw containers of frozen milk in the refrigerator or in a bowl of hot water. Using hot water is also a good way to warm chilled milk.
- Do **not** use a microwave to thaw or warm breast milk. Some healthy benefits of the milk may be affected, and hot spots can occur from uneven heating.
- Once milk is thawed, use it within 24 hours. Do **not** refreeze it. Storage guidelines may be different for preterm babies or babies who are in the hospital.

How do I get a breast pump?

Almost all insurance companies include breast pumps as one of their benefits for new mothers. Call your insurance company to find out how your insurance can help you to get a pump.

If you get services from WIC, you may be able to get a pump from your WIC clinic.

UWMC does not rent or sell pumps or pump equipment. But, we can help answer questions as needed.

What kind of breast pump is best for me?

Hospital-grade Pumps

Hospital-grade pumps are the best quality pumps. They are fast and work very well. Since they are very costly, most mothers rent them, if needed.

Most women find that they collect more milk in less time when they use a hospital-grade pump. This can be very important if your baby is premature, or if your baby is in the hospital and you cannot be together.

Double Electric Pumps

Double electric pumps are most often bought, not rented. These pumps work well when your milk supply is well established or when you only need to use the pump a few times a day.

This kind of pump can be very helpful when you are returning to work months after your baby is born.

You will need a strong, efficient pump if you need to be away from your baby for a long time. If you will only need to be away once in a while, a hand pump may be enough.

If you will be working full-time, you may find that you need a double electric pump for quick and easy milk collection.

Hand Pumps

Hand pumps are meant to be used once in a while. They are less costly but also slower than other kinds of pumps. This may be the type of pump you choose if your baby is breastfeeding well and often.

Questions?

Your questions are important.

If you have questions about breastfeeding resources, please call Lactation Services at 206.598.4628.