

Expressing and Storing Breast Milk

An information leaflet from the Breastfeeding Walk-in Clinic, Mater Dei Hospital. Phone: 25454445

Expressing your breast milk can allow you to provide your milk whilst away from your baby. This may be especially helpful if you need to return to work.

Expressing milk can be quite a chore and you need to be relaxed and unhurried. Never express to assess how much milk you are producing as no pump is as effective as a baby. Some women find they need several weeks of practice to express milk easily.

Ideally express after feeding so that your baby finds the breast full of foremilk or at feed times if you are separated from your baby. Always wash your hands before starting.

HAND EXPRESSING

- Hand expression is as effective as using a breast pump once mastered but may be tiring if you need to express several times a day.
- Make a C-shape with your hand and place your thumb and index finger on either side of the areola (the brown circle surrounding the nipple), ideally towards the edge far back from the nipple.
- Gently press your finger and thumb together, slightly rolling them without moving in a downward movement.
- Relax your finger and thumb away from each other and gently press backwards towards the chest.
- Once milk flow slows down move around the areola and repeats this action.

PUMPING

- A breast pump can make expressing easier especially if you need several bottles.
- Ensure all parts of the pump that have contact with milk are sterile or cleaned well with hot water.
- Ensure suction is on minimum before you start.
- The nipple should be placed in the centre of the flange.

- Slowly increase the suction strength until milk flows. There is no need to increase further once milk is coming out.
- Pump for approx. 15 minutes on each breast.
- Turn suction back to minimum before removing the pump flange

MAKING EXPRESSING EASIER

- Look at your baby or a photo of him/her and try to ignore how much milk there is. Looking for quantity may block the hormone reflex that causes milk to flow.
- Place a hot face cloth on your breasts whilst preparing to start.
- Massage all around the breasts in a circular movement with your fists and stroke with your fingertips downwards towards the nipple.
- When the hormone ejection reflex occurs expressing is much easier but where most babies always manage to make this happen, expressing does not. Do not be alarmed if sometimes you only manage to express a small amount of milk, this means you have emptied the foremilk stores but have not stimulated the hormone reflex. This means that expressing should never be used to assess how much milk your baby drinks.

STORING BREASTMILK

- Always use a sterile container which can be sealed i.e. with a lid. Glass is the best material as plastic tends to absorb some nutrients from the milk.
- If using plastic bags they should be for freezer use if the milk is to be frozen.
- Label your milk with the date and the time of expression.
- You can add to breast milk expressed earlier that day.
- Always store in the coolest part of the fridge, normally the top. Never store in the fridge door as it warms up quickly.
- Keep separate from other food to avoid contamination. This can be done by placing together into a larger container.
- If using freezer bags take care that they do not touch metal surfaces of the freezer which can cause small tears.
- Fresh milk is always preferable to frozen milk. Once milk is frozen a number of anti-infective properties are destroyed. Frozen breast milk still has many benefits over formula milk.
- In Malta recommended storage times for homes are

Fridge - 3 Days

Freezer - 3 Months

- Use frozen breast milk within 12-24 hours once removed from the freezer.
- Breast milk will separate once refrigerated. Gentle shaking or warming will cause it to return to normal appearance.
- Get used to the smell of your milk so that you can discard if the smell changes.
- Breast milk can remain at room temperature for several hours but it is advisable to put in the fridge as soon as possible.
- To use milk that is chilled it is necessary to warm. If milk is being transported ideally use a cool bag or ice block.