

Expressing breast milk

At the hospital

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Many new mothers choose to breastfeed their babies. Breast milk has exactly the right composition, contains lots of antibodies and is easily digestible for your baby. However, not all mothers can immediately start fully or partially breastfeeding their newborns.

For them, expressing breast milk is an option. This brochure provides more information and advice on expressing and storing breast milk.

If you need to express over a longer period, a lactation consultant will be on hand to support you.

Expressing breast milk means starting and keeping up milk production using a breast pump. You may want to start expressing for any of the following reasons:

- your baby is too small to be breastfed;
- you are taking temporary medication, meaning your breast milk
- is unsuitable for your baby;
- you are going out without your baby;
- you are returning to work;
- you need to increase your milk production;
- to relieve serious engorgement;
- your baby needs additional feeding.

Expressing breast milk

This chapter contains general advice on expressing breast milk.

When should you start expressing?

If you are unable to breastfeed your baby or if your baby is not getting enough food that way, you should start expressing between one and six hours after giving birth.

How often should you express?

Breast milk is produced on a supply and demand basis. To start the milk production and keep it going, you need to express milk just as often as you would breastfeed your baby. For stimulating breast milk production, expressing a little milk more frequently is more effective than expressing for a longer period all at once.

We recommend expressing at least six to eight times every 24 hours, or every three hours. The best thing to do is to express both breasts non-stop for fifteen minutes.

The information in this brochure is general in nature and is intended to give you an idea of the care and guidance you can expect. In your own situation, other advice or procedures may apply. This brochure is therefore only an addition to the specific (verbal) information from your specialist or practitioner.

If your milk flow slows down (after five to ten minutes), taking a break to massage your breasts can help. Stop expressing, massage your breasts, and start expressing again.

There is no need to express at exactly the same times every day, as babies also feed at irregular times. Express whenever suits you, but at least six to eight times every 24 hours. That said, you may find it easier to draw up a fixed daily schedule so you can regularly set aside enough time for it. To get your milk production going properly, we recommend that you also express at night. If your circumstances prevent you from expressing at night, we recommend not waiting more than six hours between expressing sessions. If you do wait more than six hours, one of the proteins in breast milk will cause the breastfeeding process to slow down.

Freezing breast milk

It is completely normal for you to produce more milk than your baby needs at any given time. In this case, you can freeze your milk to use at a later time. It is a good idea to express up to eight times every 24 hours to keep your milk production going.

Is your milk production slowing down?

Your milk production may decrease a little after several weeks. This is normal. It is a good idea to keep a little extra milk in the freezer as a buffer. Make sure you keep expressing as often as possible, even when your milk production slows down; at least six to eight times every 24 hours. You can express once or twice more per day, if necessary, as this will help bring your milk production back to its normal levels.

Are you taking medication?

If you are taking certain medication, you may not be able to feed your baby the milk you expressed. Your doctor can give you more information on the relevant medication. Regardless, it is important to continue expressing to get and keep your milk production going.

Expressing methods: how do they work?

You can express your milk:

- using an electric pump;
- using a manual pump;
- by hand, without a pump.

This chapter provides information about how to prepare for and go about the various expressing methods.

Expressing milk should never hurt. If you do feel pain, it is important to find out why; you can ask a nurse or lactation consultant to sit in on an expressing session. You may be using the wrong size of breast shield, or you may be pumping with too much force.

Expressing using an electric pump

Using an electric pump is a good idea when you need to get your breast milk production started. Electric pumps mimic the way a baby suckles, making them ideal for properly starting milk production. This method is also the least tiring for you.

You can choose between a single or a double electric pump:

- some mothers are more comfortable expressing each breast separately in turn (using a single pump), especially in the early days. If you prefer using a single pump, we recommend the following schedule:
 - express each breast for seven minutes;
 - then express each breast in turn for five minutes, followed by three minutes.

If you express your breasts separately, you can massage them during the process to improve milk flow.

- If you need to start your breast milk production with a pump, we recommend expressing both breasts at the same time using a professional-grade, double pump. A double pump will express both breasts simultaneously for five to fifteen minutes. There are three benefits to this:
 - it takes half the amount of time;
 - it increases your levels of the prolactin hormone;
 - your milk production will increase.

Preparation

If you start expressing while in hospital, the nursing staff will supply a pump, sterile milk bottles and stickers. This chapter outlines how best to express your breasts.

Hygiene

It is important to work as hygienically as possible when expressing. The main steps are listed below:

- Wash your hands with soap and water before you begin. Dry them thoroughly.
- Washing your breasts once a day using water is enough.
- Do not use any soap, body lotion or alcohol. These have a dehydrating effect and can cause your breasts to feel painful.
- Only touch/hold the breast shields, bottles and caps on the outside.
- If you are a patient at MMC, you will be given a clean pump set every 24 hours.
- The breast shields must be cleaned after every use. Rinse them with cold water to clean off any milk residue. Rinse them thoroughly with warm water, and then again with cold water. Clean the shields and store them in a clean, hydrophilic nappy or ironed cloth. Do not use soap (as doing so may leave soap residue). Once you are discharged from hospital, use the pump set you bought when renting or buying a pump. This set must be cleaned after each expressing session, as described in the point above. Immerse your pump set (except for the tubes and filters) in boiling water for ten minutes once a day. You can clean your pump in a microwave sterilizer or electric steam sterilizer.
- Use a clean, sterile bottle for every expressing session.

- Wear a bra that provides good support (preferably a cotton one, without wires) and use breast pads, if necessary (make sure to change them if they absorb any milk).
- Change your bra every day.
- You do not need to wash your areola before and after expressing.
- After the expressing session, turn the pump on for a while. This reduces any condensation that may form in the pump's tubes.
- After expressing, we recommend rubbing the last drop of breast milk on your nipple and leaving it to air-dry. Doing so boosts your natural resistance.

Method

- Before you use a pump for the first time,
- you should read the user manual and follow the instructions provided.
- Find a comfortable spot to express your milk.
- Sit down in a comfortable position, leaning forward slightly. Sitting comfortably has a positive effect on your milk production. Massage your breasts for a few minutes before you start using an electric pump. Massaging your breasts stimulates your let-down reflex, which will make expressing easier.
- Fit the breast shield on your breast (your nipple should be in the middle). To prevent your milk ducts from being squeezed shut, the breast shield should not be pressed too firmly onto your breast.
- Switch on the pump. It will start by producing short sucking movements. These will stimulate your let-down reflex (which "pushes" milk to your nipple, see the below paragraph). After two minutes, the pump will automatically switch to a longer sucking action.
- You can adjust the suction force as needed to make the process more comfortable.
- Massage your breasts during the expressing session to stimulate your let-down reflex and milk flow.
- When ending your session, switch off the pump before removing the breast shield from your breast; this will release the vacuum on your breast.
- There is no need to wash your areola after expressing. Rub a little breast milk on your nipples and allow them to air-dry.
- After expressing, you can mix the milk in the two bottles into a single bottle.

Expressing with a manual pump

If you do not need to express often, a manual pump is a good option. A manual pump requires a little more time and effort. You operate the pump by hand, so you can control the suction force and rhythm.

Preparation and method

See 'Expressing using an electric pump' for information on preparing and expressing.

Expressing manually, without a pump

You can also start your milk production by expressing manually. Expressing manually is a simple and cheap method to collect small amounts of colostrum during the first day after giving birth. Knowing how to express by hand is also useful when you don't have your pump with you. It does require a little practice to get right, and it is not ideal if you need to express over a longer period.

Preparation

See 'Expressing using an electric pump' for general preparations.

Method

1. make circular movements from the base of your breasts down to your nipple;
2. rub your fingertips over your skin from the base of your breasts down to your nipple;
3. lean forward slightly;
4. support your breast using your hand;
5. place your thumb and index finger two to three centimetres behind your nipple and push your breast inwards;
6. push the skin backwards, toward your chest, then roll your fingers and thumb back towards your nipple. Relax and repeat this motion;
7. switch the hand you are using to support your breast, and start over using your other hand to make sure all mammary glands are stimulated.

Stimulating your let-down reflex

Having a properly functioning let-down reflex is key to letting down milk. When your baby stimulates your nipple, your milk will make its way down to your nipple through your milk ducts. When expressing, you may need to trigger your let-down reflex by doing one or more of the following:

- find a comfortable environment where you will not be disturbed;
- tips to relax: warm your breasts by holding wet or dry warm compresses on them or by taking a hot shower;
- massage your breast. You can do this before you begin or during the expressing session. Start near your chest and work your way down to your nipple in circular movements. Finally, take a deep breath to make sure you are properly relaxed;
- stimulate your nipples by rubbing them gently or by rolling them back and forth;
- relax, do breathing exercises or simply sit comfortably and think of a nice, quiet environment;
- try to think about your baby; looking at pictures or taking in the smell of clothes your baby has worn can help;
- sit next to your baby while expressing;
- shake your breasts a little;
- express both breasts simultaneously;
- have a drink while expressing.

Expressing takes time to learn: stay positive!

Just like breastfeeding, expressing is something new mothers need to learn how to do. Your milk production is likely to be fairly low for the first few days after giving birth, so don't be disappointed if you are producing little or no milk the first few times you express. While your milk production is starting up, it can take a few minutes for milk to start flowing properly; there is nothing unusual about that. The volume of milk you are able to express may vary from session to session. For the first few days after giving birth, you may not be able to produce more than a few drops. There is no need to worry about this, as colostrum (the earliest breast milk after giving birth) contains high levels of antibodies for your baby, meaning even the smallest amount is highly valuable for your baby and contributes to his health.

It is easy to get a demoralized, bored or frustrated when you are expressing six to eight times a day. There will be times where you don't feel like you can keep doing it. Accept these feelings as normal, and remember that you are producing the best food your baby can get. Ultimately, you and your baby are working towards a time at which you will both be able to experience the benefits of breastfeeding.

How much milk should I express?

All breast milk is welcome; the more milk, the better the milk production process is working. Excess milk can always be frozen. If you prefer to express less frequently because you are producing too much milk, you should discuss this with a lactation consultant. A baby needs more and more food as it grows. As such, you need to make sure that you have enough milk for when you return home with your baby. If your baby is in hospital, your milk production may decrease because you are worried about your baby or feeling exhausted.

As a general rule, after 14 to 21 days of intensive expressing, the total volume of breast milk you produce in a day should be over 500 ml. If you are not producing this volume or if you have any concerns about your production, talk to someone about it. Together with a lactation consultant, you can run through your expressing approach so far, pinpoint the causes of reduced production and potentially find a solution.

Not all mothers find that expressing helps start their breast milk production. A pump is simply no match for the feeling of a baby on your breast. The volume of milk you produce also depends on your baby's condition. Worrying about your baby will slow down or impede your let-down reflex, meaning it will be more difficult to express lots of milk.

Even if you are only expressing a little, the process will send the signal to your body to keep producing milk. In the end, even small amounts of breast milk are good for your baby. All breast milk is welcome.

Storing breast milk

The following rules apply to storing breast milk:

- After expressing, breast milk should be stored in the fridge
- in a properly sealed bottle. The hospital will give new mothers bottles to use at home. Mark the bottles with a sticker stating your baby's name and the date and time the milk was expressed. Breast milk should be stored in the fridge immediately after expressing. When using breast milk at the hospital, it can be stored at room temperature for up to four hours.
- If using a double pump, you can mix the milk expressed from each side in a single bottle.
- For the first seven days, you will be expressing colostrum. Mark this on the bottles with a yellow sticker. Use the sticker to write down how many days have passed since you gave birth. After this seven-day period, switch to white stickers.
- Expressed breast milk can be frozen. Your milk can be stored in a freezer (-18 to -21 °C) for up to six months after expressing.
- Once thawed, breast milk should never be refrozen. Thawed breast milk must be used within 24 hours. Make sure the milk is stored in the fridge at all times.
- Never store breast milk in the vegetable drawer or door of the fridge, as the temperature is higher there than in the rest of the fridge.

Buying or renting a breast pump

When your breast milk production has been going for two to three weeks, it may be a good idea to buy your own breast pump. Make sure any pump you buy is suitable for maintaining your milk production. There are many different pumps on the market, at various price levels. Seeking out plenty of information about the options and differences will help you find a pump that is suitable for your situation.

Useful addresses

If you are looking to rent or buy a breast pump, the following places will be able to help:

- Vergo Thuiszorgwinkel
Kastelenplein 168, 5653 LX Eindhoven
Tel. +31 800 288 7766 (free)

If you live elsewhere in the Netherlands and you would like to rent or buy a breast pump closer to home, the following may be useful:

- Independent lactation consultants who rent breast pumps
- www.nvlborstvoeding.nl
- www.borstkolven.net
- www.moedermelknetwerk.nl
- www.mypump.nl

Reimbursement of costs

Most supplementary health insurance policies cover the full or partial cost of renting a breast pump and visiting a lactation consultant, if necessary.

More information

If you still have questions after reading this brochure, feel free to ask the nurse looking after you or your baby and/or the lactation consultants.

Telephone numbers

Maternity suites:	+31 40 888 95 51
Neonatal Medium Care Unit:	+31 40 888 93 71
Neonatal Intensive Care Unit:	+31 40 888 93 60
Lactation consultants:	+31 40 888 84 42

Useful websites

The internet also offers a wealth of information on breastfeeding and expressing:

- The nationwide La Leche League helpline can help: +31 111 41 31 89. More information can also be found on www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/