

Expressing breastmilk (0–18 months)

Why express breastmilk?

Expressing breastmilk is when you empty milk from your breast.

You might want to express your breastmilk because your breasts feel swollen or engorged or because you want to have some breastmilk stored in the fridge or freezer for use later.

There are three ways to express:

- by hand
- with a hand-held pump
- with an electric pump.

How to express breastmilk

Here are the basic steps for **expressing breastmilk by hand**.

1. Wash your hands with soap and warm water.
2. Place a clean container or a wide bowl under your breast, either between your legs or on a low table, leaving both your hands free.
3. You can support your breast with one hand if you have large and heavy breasts.
4. Place your thumb and finger directly opposite each other, on either side of the areola (brown area surrounding the nipple).
5. Gently press inward towards the centre of the breast, until you feel the bulk of the breast. Expressing shouldn't hurt.
6. Gently press finger and thumb towards each other using a rhythmic rolling movement. This will compress the ducts, and milk will flow out of your nipple.
7. Once the milk flow slows, move your fingers to a different position around the nipple and press again. This expresses more milk and empties all sectors of the breast. Change hands if your fingers get tired.
8. Repeat the process on the other breast.
9. If you need more milk, change from breast to breast, or wait and try again later.

Hand-held and electric pumps consist of a suction cup attached to a collection bottle or container. Place the suction cup directly over your breast (or breasts, in the case of double pumps) with your nipple centred.

If you're using a hand-held pump, squeeze the pump handle gently and rhythmically. With an electric breast pump, start with low suction and increase it to a level that's comfortable for you.

Pump until your milk flow stops, then pump from the other breast.

Expressing breastmilk: Tips

These ideas can make expressing easier, no matter what method you use.

- Make sure you are relaxed and comfortable before you start expressing.
- Have a clean towel nearby to catch any spills or to wipe slippery, wet fingers.
- Gently massage your breast to encourage the let-down reflex. Start from the top of your breast and stroke towards your nipple. Massage the underside of your breast too. Do this several times to ensure the whole breast is massaged.
- While you're expressing, don't worry if you only see a few drops at first. After the let-down reflex happens, you should get sprays from the nipple with each squeeze or pump.
- Expressing milk can be tiring, so stop for a drink of water if you want to, to help you relax before you start again.
- If you're expressing with a pump, you can often get more milk by hand-expressing after the flow with the pump has stopped.

How to clean expressing equipment

Wash expressing equipment thoroughly every 24 hours. Use warm soapy water, rinse well and air-dry or dry parts with clean paper towel. Store covered until next use. Expressing equipment doesn't need to be washed after every use, or sterilised. However, some parents of newborns feel more comfortable washing and sterilising after each use, and that's OK.

Between washes, when you have finished an expressing session, you can cover equipment and store it in the fridge without rinsing it. You can also store it covered at room temperature (25°C or lower) if you have rinsed it first in water that is safe to drink.