



# EXPRESSING BREAST MILK

One of the basic features of breastfeeding is that the more milk you ask for, the more you will produce. New babies seem to know this and feed very frequently in the first few weeks to establish this new supply.

Sometimes women are advised to give **extra** stimulation to the breasts in order to increase a dwindling supply. This is usually by encouraging more feeding but can also be through hand expression or pump use. This is not about *collecting* milk.

Many new parents are keen to *share* feeding their baby. And in some cases offering a little expressed breast milk (EBM) can prevent someone giving up altogether.

However, during the first month or so, when a baby is learning how to attach properly at the breast, offering EBM via a bottle can confuse this process. So, if there is a real necessity for extra milk to be given, we would suggest this is via a feeding cup.

By 4-6 weeks the baby has usually got sufficiently good at breastfeeding so is able to attempt an alternative way of feeding, if you want to try.

Breast and bottle feeding are as different as sucking juice out of a straw and gulping a pint from an open glass. The latter hardly needs any sucking; instead a more muscular action of the throat is used. Establishing breastfeeding can be hard and tiring so adding the extra job of pumping, with all the additional sterilising etc can push you over the edge. If someone else is keen to feed ask them to wait a few weeks or maybe get them to consider taking charge of some other area of baby care, such as bathing, chief entertainer, settling, changing, massage...the list is endless.



Hopefully you are both committed to breastfeeding and all its benefits. Success is rarely achieved without good support and encouragement.

However, if or when you do decide to express milk, it's worth learning how to do it effectively.

Milk comes out of the breast because of stimulation and not by suction alone. Many pumps have stimulation settings, which can be helpful, but doing a bit of preliminary work yourself is definitely worthwhile.

Simply attempting to haul milk out of an unprepared breast is rarely successful. The fine tube work that makes up the breast tissue can easily become damaged and mastitis can develop, so be careful (see our sheet on mastitis).

It's worth recognising though that some women simply can't get the hormones flowing with a pump that they can when their baby is feeding, so are never able to produce much pumped milk. If this is a problem for you, you may have more success with hand expression.

## EQUIPMENT

Hand pumps, battery or small electric pumps, large rented heavy duty pumps – what ever you choose can be expensive so ask around and consider trialling a friends pump before you decide.

You will also need bottles, teats and a sterilising kit. For hand expression you will need a wide mouthed, sterilised bowl, to collect the milk.

## PREPARATION

Warm your breasts. Use flannels or express after a shower or whilst in the bath – not with an electric pump though!

Gently massage the breasts in a circular motion or downward stroking movements towards the nipple.

Tweaking and rolling of the nipple can be helpful – remember you are trying to trigger a let down reflex.

Use your senses – think about your baby, look at her, stroke and caress her, smell some of her clothing. In her absence have a photo on your phone or better still a short clip of her waking up.

After all this, any hand or pump expression is much more likely to be successful.

## COLLECTION

If you drip from one side whilst feeding on the other, this milk can be *caught* in breast shells / collecting cups (easily available in big stores or on line). These can be emptied into a sterile bottle kept in the fridge throughout the day. At the end of the day you could have an ounce or two without having to do any pumping at all.

Alternatively you can pump off a small amount from the second breast after or during each feed combining all that into one bottle to be used or stored at the end of the day.

Pumping on one breast whilst feeding on the other makes clever use of the let down reflex already present...brilliant.

Or if you want to do some regular pumping you could pull off a whole feed at a time for Dad to give. Do remember though that extra stimulation will produce more milk so the small collections throughout the day will cause less disruption to your supply. If you want more information about pumping, ask for help.

When pumping, be careful to hold the flange evenly and don't press in too hard on the breast as this can cause mastitis.

## **STORAGE OF EXPRESSED BREAST MILK**

EBM can be stored in the main body of a fridge 4C or lower (not the door) for up to 5 days, 2 weeks in the ice compartment and up to 6 months in a freezer.

Don't worry if the milk appears to separate after storage, simply swirl to combine again.

Amazingly stored breast milk gets cleaner over time due to its antibacterial properties – how cool is that !