

Expressing your milk when you and your baby are separated following birth

Being separated from your baby can be a shock and is often a worrying time. You can make a big difference to your baby's progress and health by expressing your breast milk. This leaflet will explain how to express and how to build and safeguard your supply, as breastfeeding directly may be delayed for a time when you or your baby is unwell or your baby is premature.

Your breast milk is unique to your baby, and provides nutrition and comfort to help your baby thrive and grow as well as antibodies to protect baby from infection. This is particularly important for premature babies as breastfeeding helps protect against gastrointestinal infections and the risks of this and other infections can increase in babies who are either partially breastfed or not being breastfed at all. Even if you have not yet decided whether to breastfeed, expressing your milk (even for a short time) is of immense benefit to your vulnerable baby and we strongly recommend you try this if you can. Staff can help you decide what is the best decision for you and will support you in your choices. If your baby is premature and likely to be on the neonatal unit for some time, read this leaflet together with the following: 'You and your baby' Supporting love and nurture on the neonatal unit Unicef (www.babyfriendly.org.uk), available from Buscot staff and 'The Best Start' a guide to expressing for your premature baby Bliss (www.bliss.org.uk) and Skin-to-skin with your premature baby Bliss (www.bliss.org.uk).



Key points:

- Begin expressing as soon as you feel well enough, (ideally by 2 hours).
- Continue expressing at least 8-10 times in 24 hours (including at least once at night).
- Before you start expressing try: breast massage, relaxation, skin contact, being close to your baby, or having a photograph or something that smells of the baby, as this will help you release your milk.
- With each day the amount of milk you express should increase.
- For longer term expressing: Fit in the timings to work around your lifestyle, but try not to have gaps of any longer than 4 hours (daytime) and 6 hours (night time).

When should I start to express?

You should try to express as soon as possible after birth (ideally within 2 hours) as colostrum (the thick first milk produced in the first few days) is higher in antibodies in the first 24 hours after birth and the earlier you start the more likely you will produce enough in the longer term.

Which method is recommended if my baby is premature, very small or unwell?

1. Hand expressing is useful in the first 24-48 hours or so, when colostrum is produced as it is easier to capture - See below for how to hand express.
2. Double pumping with electric pumps is strongly recommended where your baby has been born prematurely as it is usually more efficient.
3. Some mothers prefer a manual hand pump and choose to buy their own, (the hospital does not provide this type).
4. Combining hand and double electric pump will help you to maximise your supply.

Ask a member of staff to show you to get started in your chosen method/s. (You will soon learn about sterilising labelling and storage of your milk).

How do I express milk for my baby?

- Always wash your hands thoroughly before starting.
- Make a drink and get yourself comfortable, try to relax and focus on your baby.
- Express by your baby's side.
- Enjoy skin to skin contact with your baby prior to expressing where possible.
- If your baby is not with you when you express it may help to have a photo of your baby, a garment which smells of your baby, relaxing music on your iPod, or to get someone to massage your back in order to help you relax.

Hand expression:

1. Wash hands thoroughly.
2. Have a sterilised cup/ syringe ready to use before you start.
3. Start by gently massaging all around your breast and rolling your nipple
4. Make a 'C' shape with your finger and thumb, and place your thumb above and fingers below the nipple about 2-3cms from the base of your nipple.
5. Build up a rhythm. Continue to gently press in a rhythmic manner until the flow stops and then move round to another part of the breast and repeat. Keep your finger and thumb opposite each other as you rotate round the breast.
6. When the flow slows down, change to the other breast.
7. Keep changing breasts until the flow subsides completely, for about 15 minutes or so each side.
8. It is usual to see just a few drops at first but the volume will increase as the days go on. It is all used for your baby and even just a few drops are hugely beneficial for your baby.

9. If there are no signs of milk, move your finger either nearer or further away from the nipple until you find the right spot, and tuck back towards your rib cage first prior to pressing and releasing. Ask for further help.
10. Your milk will need to be labelled and taken up to Buscot Ward.

Building and maintain a good supply

Start and continue expressing at least 8-10 times in every 24 hours, including at least once at night.

Once you are producing 750mls a day (or more) you can reduce the frequency but still have a plentiful supply. The staff will review your expressing at frequent intervals (usually weekly), but do seek help if you encounter any problems at any stage.

What if I have difficulty expressing my milk?

It is common for the amounts of milk produced at each session to vary. Aim for 750mls/24 hours (range from 600-900mls/24 hours) by 10/14. We will talk to you regularly about this and to keep you on target as you may need additional help. Temporary reduction in milk supply often coincides with set-backs in baby's progress, or with the distractions of being at home without your baby.

Please speak to your baby's nurse on Buscot Ward as your first port of call, or a member of staff from the postnatal ward. The specialist infant feeding midwives can also help.

Tips for boosting supply:

- Resume prolonged skin contact wherever possible
- Try to relax before expressing
- Express by the cot/incubator
- Express in clusters, combine hand and pump (20mins pump then break for 20mins repeated for 3 rounds at least once per day)
- Allow your baby to lick and nuzzle around your breast and nipple (wherever possible)
- Talk to and gently stroke your baby prior to expressing
- Watch these video expressing clips: www.babyfriendly.org.uk/parents/resources/audiovisual
The Best Beginnings video clip is also useful especially for preterm mothers, see <http://sw4.bestbeginnings.org.uk>.
- Revisit the key points at the beginning of this leaflet.

When you go home:

- After discharge community support can be accessed via virtual video consultations. [See Feeding resources during Covid-19 leaflet](#)
- There are breast pumps available to you (free of charge) if your baby is on Buscot Ward at the time you are discharged home. Some hospital grade pumps can be hired at discount from the manufacturer – Speak to Buscot staff about this

- The nurses will arrange the pump and expressing set for you to take home and show you how to use them.
- The staff will advise whether to bring in your milk fresh or frozen, depending on how long your baby is likely to stay in.
- You will need to return the breast pump when your baby is discharged from Buscot.

If you are separated from your baby because of fostering or adoption speak with the Poppy Team who can support you with continued expressing

More information

The following sources are particularly useful:

1. BLISS – the premature baby charity ‘You and Your baby’ Supporting love and nurture on the neonatal unit Unicef (www.babyfriendly.org.uk).
2. ‘The best start’ A guide to expressing for your premature baby Bliss (www.bliss.org.uk)
3. Skin-to-skin with your premature baby Bliss (www.bliss.org.uk).
4. BLISS also have a Parent Support Helpline - Freephone 0500 618140.
5. The Breast Feeding Network – information available from <http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/pdfs/BFNExpressing&Storing.pdf>
Supporter line – 0300 100 0210 – calls are directed to local supporters in the area.
6. Babies in Buscot Support Group (BIBS) – 0845 166 9067.
7. Association of Breastfeeding and Mothers – ‘Expressing and Storing Breast Milk’ available from www.abm.me.uk. There is a counselling helpline – 08444 122 949.
8. There is a folder of additional information kept in the office in Iffley Ward, so just ask a member of staff to see it.
9. The National Breastfeeding Helpline is 0300 100 0212.
10. Expressing video clips found at www.babyfriendly.org.uk/parents/resources/audiovisual) and for premature babies try small wonders from Best Beginnings <http://sw4.bestbeginnings.org.uk>.
11. Small wonders DVD “Helping parents to be at the heart of their baby’s care” <http://sw4.bestbeginnings.org.uk>.

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Reviewed: July 2020 (Claire Carter)

Approved: Maternity Information Group & Patient Information manager, September 2020

Review due: September 2022