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## **ILCA's Inside Track: Milk Expression and Pumping**

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# ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

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## Milk Expression and Pumping

By Paula Freeman, RPT, IBCLC, and Rebecca Mannel, BS, IBCLC

Removing milk from your breasts is a learned skill, and the more you practice the easier it becomes. You can remove milk manually or with a breast pump. Expressing milk by hand is a useful skill to learn. It is free and you don't need special equipment.

### The reasons you might remove milk from your breasts

- To help your baby latch on by expressing a few drops onto your nipple
- To keep your skin healthy by massaging a few drops of breast milk onto your nipples
- To relieve fullness in your breasts
- To increase milk production
- To save milk for times when you will be away from your baby

### When to pump or express milk

- If your baby cannot breastfeed soon after birth, try to begin pumping as soon as possible. The sooner you start pumping, the more milk you will have in the coming weeks.
- If you are trying to relieve overly full breasts, you will want to remove the excess milk as soon as you feel uncomfortable. Expressing can soften your breasts, which will help your baby latch on.
- Remember the more milk you remove, the more milk you'll make. Ask your lactation consultant about how much milk you should remove.
- If you want to start saving breastmilk, it is best to wait until your baby is nursing well and your milk production is established. This is usually when your baby is about 3 to 4 weeks old.
- Breasts are usually most full in the morning.

You can plan to express milk at that time, after your baby breastfeeds.

### Preparing to remove milk

- Wash your hands with soap and water.
- Have a clean container ready (see later section).
- If using a pump, have it clean and assembled.
- Choose a time when you can relax and do not feel rushed.
- Find a warm and private place where you can relax comfortably.
- Listen to music if that helps you relax, and have a picture of your baby if you are separated.
- Massage your breasts in circles or stroke them from the back toward the nipple to help your milk to flow.
- Lean over and gently shake your breasts.
- If needed, place warm, wet cloths on your breasts or take a warm shower or bath.

### Hand expression

This describes one way to express milk. You may find another method that works for you.





- Place your thumb and forefinger about 1-1½ inches back from the nipple.
- Press your fingers back toward your chest wall and then bring your fingers together and gently pull them forward toward the nipple.
- You may need to do this several times before you see any milk. You may also try moving your thumb and finger farther back from the nipple.
- Move your thumb and finger around the breast to press around the breast to get all the milk.

### Using a breast pump

- An electric pump that pumps both breasts at the same time generally removes most of the milk in the shortest time.
  - It is useful for the mother who expresses frequently.
  - A mother whose baby cannot breast-feed will need a hospital-grade breast pump.
  - A mother who works full-time usually needs an electric pump that can pump both breasts at the same time.
- If you express milk only a few times per week or less, you could use a smaller electric or battery pump or a manual pump. Batteries will need to be changed or recharged after 2 to 3 pumping sessions.
- Clean the pump parts and bottles with hot soapy water and rinse them thoroughly. You could also wash them in a dishwasher.

### Storing your milk

- Use a clean, food-grade container.
- Glass or hard plastic bottles preserve the quality of the milk best.
- Babies cared for in a hospital special nursery may need the milk stored in special containers.

### Safe methods and storage times for milk to be given to healthy infants

Room temperature	Up to 6 hours
Refrigerator (fresh)	Up to 8 days
Ice chest or cooler with frozen gel packs	Up to 24 hours
Thawed and placed in refrigerator	Up to 24 hours
Freezer section of 2 door refrigerator (not in door)	Up to 6 months
Deep freezer	Up to 12 months

Ask your lactation consultant about storage times for milk to be given to premature or sick babies.

A lactation consultant can help you decide which breast pump you need. The method you use will determine how well your breasts are drained and how long expression will take. Follow the directions for how to use a particular type of pump. Expressing or pumping should not hurt, and it gets easier with practice. If you have trouble or pain, call your lactation consultant for help. Your milk is a special gift only YOU can give your baby!

### FIND HELP FAST

Go to "Find a Lactation Consultant" at [www.ilca.org](http://www.ilca.org) to locate a lactation consultant in your area. You can also ask your doctor or a nurse at your hospital.

### Your Local Lactation Consultant