

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. Our priority is reuniting you with your baby as soon as possible. You may be receiving this leaflet because you, or your baby, are unwell or your baby is premature and needs extra care so cannot be with you, or is unable to feed directly. We are here to support you physically and mentally at this time.

Introduction

The information in this leaflet will explain more about how you can make a big difference to your baby's progress and health by expressing your breast milk. It will explain how to express and how to build and safeguard your supply, until you can breastfeed directly. Your breast milk is unique to your baby, and provides nutrition to help your baby thrive and grow as well as antibodies to help protect your baby from infection. This is particularly important for premature babies as breastmilk helps protect against gastrointestinal and other infections.



Expressing breast milk

Even if you have chosen not to breastfeed, expressing your milk (even for a short time) is of huge benefit to your vulnerable baby and we strongly recommend you try this if you can. Even small amounts of colostrum (the first milk) can give your baby a real advantage with fighting infection and can emotionally help you at this difficult time. Staff will discuss your preferences and support you in your choices. Remember that any breast milk has great value, even if you are only able to express for a short time it is very worthwhile. If your baby is unwell or premature and likely to be on Buscot neonatal unit for some time, read this leaflet together with the following:

- Unicef (www.babyfriendly.org.uk) 'You and your baby' Supporting love and nurture on the neonatal unit – https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/08/neonatal_leaflet_online.pdf

There are useful resources online which are specific for parents with babies in special care on the Bliss website (www.bliss.org.uk).

- *Skin-to-skin with your premature baby* – <https://www.bliss.org.uk/parents/in-hospital/looking-after-your-baby-on-the-neonatal-unit/skin-to-skin-and-kangaroo-care>
- *Expressing your breast milk* – <https://www.bliss.org.uk/parents/about-your-baby/feeding/expressing>

When should I start to express?

You should try to express as soon as possible after birth (ideally within 2 hours of giving birth) 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 as early stimulation sets up future milk supply. This is why we recommend early expressing, even if your baby isn't being fed by mouth and is receiving an intravenous drip. Buscot staff will safely store your precious breastmilk so they, or ideally you, can give it to your baby as soon as possible.

Key points

- Begin expressing as soon as you feel well enough, (ideally with 2 hours after birth).
- 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 colostrum or first milk.
- With each day the amount of milk you express should increase as your milk 'comes in'. Do not be disheartened if it is only a few drops to begin with, you are signalling to your body that your baby needs milk.
- 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).

What are the different ways I can express?

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. Pumping both breasts using an electric pump (double pumping) is more efficient once there is a larger quantity of milk (for example day 2 onwards).
3. You might prefer a manual hand pump, if so you will need to ask someone to purchase one and bring it in as we do not supply these.
4. Combining hand expressing and then double pumping with an electric pump will help you to establish and maintain your supply.

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

How do I express milk for my baby?

- Always wash your hands thoroughly before starting.
- Have a drink nearby (it's important to stay hydrated!) and get yourself comfortable, try to relax and focus on your baby - photos, videos or a piece of clothing can really help as well as relaxing music or even a back massage.
- Ideally express by your baby's side, we can provide a privacy screen/curtain if you would like, please just ask.
- Enjoy skin to skin contact with your baby prior to expressing where possible.

Compassionate

Aspirational

Resourceful

Excellent

Hand expressing:

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, not touching your areola (darker area around your nipple)
5. Press your finger and thumb back towards your chest and then roll then forwards without taking them off your skin. This sounds harder than it is! You will quickly learn this technique and we can help demonstrate
6. 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.
7. When the flow slows down, change to the other breast.
8. Keep changing breasts until the flow subsides completely, for about 15 minutes or so each side.
9. 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.
10. 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.

Do not get frustrated if you don't have success the first time, we are here to help and can give you more tips and demonstrate the method.

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 - this is important as milk supply is at its peak in the early hours of the morning.

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 expressing/pumping session to vary. Just because you have small amounts to begin with doesn't mean you can't build to a plentiful supply. Ideally you will be able to produce, on average, 750mls per 24 hours by days 10 to 14. We will talk to you regularly about this and to keep you on target as you may need additional help or support. 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. Your emotional wellbeing is important so if you feel anxious it may affect the hormones responsible for releasing your milk during these times. Seek support from staff on Buscot Ward, or a member of the team from the postnatal ward. The specialist infant feeding staff are available by referral if specific challenges arise.

Tips for boosting supply:

- Resume prolonged skin contact wherever possible
- Try to relax before expressing
- Express next to your baby
- Express in clusters, combine hand and pump (20mins pump then break for 20 mins 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 this expressing video – <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/>

Look for the Resources information added to your child's Red Book, there are local sources of support available depending where you live. Further useful resources and support can be found on the websites below:

- <https://www.laleche.org.uk/expressing-your-milk/>
- <https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/breastfeeding-help/expressing-storing/>

There is also a National Breastfeeding Helpline for telephone support with expressing or feeding – <https://www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk/>

When you go home:

- After discharge community support can be accessed via community midwives or health visitors.
- 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 on Buscot.
- 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.

Additional resources available

- BLISS Parent Support online – <https://www.bliss.org.uk/parents/support/emotional-support>
- Babies in Buscot Support Group (BIBS)
- Association of Breastfeeding and Mothers – <https://abm.me.uk/breastfeeding-information/expressing-breast-milk/> 'Expressing and Storing Breast Milk' available There is also an ABM telephone support line <https://abm.me.uk/get-breastfeeding-support/>
- Expressing video clips found at [Hand expression video - Baby Friendly Initiative \(unicef.org.uk\)](https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/)

- For premature babies try small wonders from Best Beginnings
<http://sw4.bestbeginnings.org.uk>
- Small wonders online has several useful videos about expressing and what to expect with a baby in special care – <https://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/watch-small-wonders-online>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Infant Feeding Team Lead MW, July 2020

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