

# Expressing Breast Milk

Your breast milk provides the optimal nutrition for your infant. Feeding from the breast is the natural and normal way to provide breast milk to your infant.

Sometimes, there are reasons to express breast milk such as; separation from your baby after birth, to soften engorged breasts that are too hard for your baby to latch onto, or to increase milk supply. You can express breast milk by hand or by using a pump.

Expressing breast milk is very different from breastfeeding. Every woman is different. Many things affect the amount of milk expressed such as; baby's age, time of day, the amount of milk your breasts hold, and comfort level. Usually, a baby feeding at the breast does a better job at removing milk from your breasts.

## Tips for Expressing Breast Milk

**Express early, express often.** You should start expressing milk as early as possible to build your milk supply if your baby is not feeding at the breast. Express a minimum of 8 times in 24 hours, including through the night, to maintain and/or increase your milk supply. Express each breast until the breast is effectively drained.

**Use your hands.** Recent research shows that gently squeezing your breasts while pumping and doing hand expression after pumping can help empty your breasts and greatly increase your milk volume.

**Pick a good quality pump. Make sure the pump fits.** Good quality pumps offer different size flanges/ breast shields (which may need to be purchased separately). It is important to look at your nipple size, not breast size. You will know the pump is a good fit if you can see some space around your nipple as it is pulled into the flange/breast shield tunnel. The tunnel is too small if your nipple rubs, and too large if more than the areola is being pulled into the tunnel.

**Being comfortable equals more milk.** Set the pump to the lowest setting before turning it on. You can gradually increase the setting to a suction that is comfortable for you. Using a higher suction setting does not mean you will pump more milk and may cause damage to your nipples.

**Mimic your baby's suck rhythm.** Babies suck fast at the start of a feed and then slow down when the milk begins to flow from the breast. You can adjust your pump speeds to mimic this rhythm.








**See the back of the page for methods of expressing breast milk.**

The Region of Waterloo Public Health does not recommend sharing or purchasing a used breast pump as milk in non-hospital grade pumps can back up into parts of the pump that are difficult to clean. Many brands do not offer replacement parts.

## Methods of Breast Milk Expression

For all pumps, follow the manufacturer's instructions for assembly, cleaning and use.

Type of Expression	Good Option For	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>Hand Expression</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Removing colostrum in the first few days (most effective method)</li> <li>Softening engorged breasts before breastfeeding</li> <li>Short term or occasional expression of breast milk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Free, no equipment needed</li> <li>Available anytime, anywhere</li> <li>With practice, some women may find it easier to trigger a let-down of milk with this method</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For long term expression of breast milk, may be more difficult to maintain your milk supply</li> <li>Requires use of hands to express</li> </ul>
<b>Hospital-Grade Electric Pump</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing and maintaining your milk supply long term (most effective method)</li> <li>Building your milk supply if your baby is not feeding at the breast</li> <li>Longer term pumping or exclusive pumping, if required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Able to pump both breasts at the same time</li> <li>Able to control suction strength and speed</li> <li>Available to rent (check with your local hospital or a medical supply store)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expensive to purchase but available to rent</li> <li>Heavy to transport</li> <li>Requires an electrical outlet</li> </ul>
<b>Electric/ Battery Operated Pump</b> Double Electric Pump 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More frequent expression of breast milk</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hands free, portable models available</li> <li>Option to power using batteries or an electrical outlet</li> <li>Some models offer rechargeable batteries</li> <li>Able to control suction strength and speed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May run out of batteries</li> <li>Can be expensive to purchase</li> </ul>
Single Electric Pump 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short term or occasional expression of breast milk once milk supply has been established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only requires use of one hand</li> <li>Option to power using batteries or an electrical outlet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May experience lower suction strength</li> <li>More time consuming to pump one breast at a time</li> <li>May run out of batteries</li> </ul>
<b>Manual Hand Pump</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Short term or occasional expression of breast milk once milk supply has been established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small and easy to carry</li> <li>Does not require batteries or an electrical outlet</li> <li>Easy to clean</li> <li>Least expensive pump</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires use of hands to pump</li> <li>More difficult to mimic baby's suck rhythm</li> </ul>
<p><b>IMPORTANT:</b> Do not use rubber bulb pumps. These pumps may damage your nipples as the suction is hard to control and may increase the risk of breast milk contamination because the bulb is hard to clean.</p>			

**Questions or concerns?** Talk to a Public Health Nurse at 519-575-4400.

Accessible formats of this document are available upon request.

**Region of Waterloo Public Health**

*Healthy Living*