

# Expressing breast milk for your baby

A guide on how to express breast milk



**We have written this booklet as a guide to expressing breast milk for your baby. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your midwife or neonatal nurse.**

## **Expressing your breast milk**

Expressing milk means squeezing milk out of your breast (by hand or with a pump) so you can store it and feed it to your baby later. Expressing allows you to provide your baby with breast milk even if you are unable to attach your baby directly to your breast.

If, for any reason, you are unable to breastfeed your baby after giving birth, it is important that you begin expressing your breast milk as soon as possible. This is because your breast milk, including your colostrum (the first breast milk your body makes), is the perfect source of nutrition for your baby. It contains antibodies which protect your baby from infection and help their immune system to develop. It also helps your baby's digestive system to develop, which protects them from allergies.

To have the best chance of achieving a full milk supply, we recommend you express your breast milk by hand as soon as possible after giving birth (ideally within the first couple of hours). Please ask your midwife or neonatal nurse to show you how to hand express, and for a hand expressing admission pack. This pack will include an information factsheet about hand expressing and some sterile syringes and pots to collect your colostrum.

## Helping your milk to flow

When you express your breast milk, you may find it helps to:

- be near to your baby
- have something with you that reminds you of your baby (this may be a photo or something they have worn which you can touch and smell)
- take slow, deep breaths to help you relax
- be in a relaxing space (if you can)
- sit in a comfortable position
- take some pain relief medication if necessary (for more information about pain relief medication, speak to your midwife or read the 'Your medication after the birth of your baby' factsheet included in the useful links section at the end of this booklet)
- warm up your breasts first before expressing by applying a warm compress (such as a flannel)
- gently stroke and massage your breasts and nipples

These things can help trigger a release of oxytocin (the love hormone), which encourages your milk to flow (your 'let-down reflex').

## Top tips for expressing breast milk

- Your breast milk supply is determined by how often you remove milk (express or breastfeed). If you do not express or breastfeed regularly, your milk supply will decrease (try not to leave a gap of longer than four hours between expressions).
- A softer (emptier) breast makes milk faster than a harder (fuller) one, so expressing frequently produces more milk than expressing less frequently.
- Having skin-to-skin cuddles with your baby whenever it is possible to do so, as well as expressing near your baby, will also help increase your milk supply.
- **If your baby is being cared for in the neonatal unit**, we recommend you start expressing your breast milk by hand within the first couple of hours after giving birth.

- Aim to express eight times in 24 hours, with no longer than four hours between expressions.
- **It is very important to express at least once overnight.** This is because your body releases more prolactin (the hormone that tells your body to make milk) during the night. Expressing at night helps support your milk production and maintain your milk supply. If your baby is able to breastfeed, this will also stimulate your breasts to produce milk.

**'If you don't take it, your breast won't make it.'**

**'If you don't use it, you lose it.'**

## Expressing breast milk by hand

The milk you produce in the first three days after giving birth is called colostrum. It's a thick, concentrated milk that is usually a golden yellow colour. Where colostrum comes out of the breast drop by drop, hand expressing is the ideal method for collecting it. Don't worry if you are only producing small amounts, this is normal. Every drop counts.

You may also find it useful to hand express before or after using a breast pump, or you may prefer to solely express by hand and not use a breast pump at all.

Hand expressing also allows you to target specific areas of your breast, which can help clear a blocked duct or if you are suffering with mastitis (when your breast becomes swollen, hot and painful).

## How to hand express

Please ask your midwife or neonatal nurse to show you how to hand express, and for a hand expressing admission pack.

You can also follow the steps below:

1. Wash and dry your hands thoroughly before you begin.
2. If you are collecting your colostrum, you will need a clean, sterilised syringe, as well as a clean, sterilised larger container. Have these items ready before you start.
3. Make yourself comfortable and try to relax. Warmth will help, so try gently massaging your breasts with a warm flannel first.
4. Use your hand to cup one of your breasts. Your hand should be in a 'C' shape around your nipple with four fingers under your breast and your thumb at the top. Your thumb and fingers should be about 2 to 3cm away from the base of your nipple.
5. Use your thumb and index finger to gently squeeze. Release the pressure and then repeat to create a rhythm. This shouldn't hurt. Avoid sliding your fingers over your skin as this may cause discomfort. If your milk doesn't flow, try moving your fingers slightly towards your nipple or further away, finding the spot that works best for you. You could also try gently massaging your breast.



6. Collect your colostrum with the sterilised syringe and if necessary, decant to the sterilised larger container. Colostrum is very concentrated and will come out of your breast drop by drop. At first, only a few drops will come out at each session, but with practise and time, you should get more.
7. When the drops slow down, move your fingers round to try a different section of your breast and repeat.
8. Repeat the process for your second breast.



## Expressing breast milk with a breast pump

Breast pumps are designed to mimic your baby's sucking action. There are two different types: electric and manual. With the manual type, you squeeze the plunger by hand, while the electric version does the work for you.

We recommend hand expressing your breast milk for the first two days after giving birth before using a breast pump. However, if advised by your midwife or neonatal nurse, a breast pump can be used six hours after giving birth.

Electric breast pumps are available for use on the neonatal unit and the postnatal wards. Please ask your midwife or neonatal nurse for an electric breast pump expressing kit. They can also show you how to assemble the kit, how to use the pumps and how to sterilise the equipment.

## Cleaning and sterilising your electric breast pump expressing kit

While your baby is in hospital, your electric breast pump expressing kit should be washed in warm soapy water after each use and then stored in a clean container. You will then need to sterilise the kit just before you express. Steri-Sacs and an industrial microwave can be used to sterilise your kit on the neonatal unit and postnatal wards. If you are expressing your milk at home, please use your preferred method to sterilise your kit.

For more information about sterilising your kit, scan the QR code or visit:

[www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/feeding/practical-tips/how-sterilise-baby-bottles-breast-pumps-and-other-feeding-equipment](http://www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/feeding/practical-tips/how-sterilise-baby-bottles-breast-pumps-and-other-feeding-equipment)



## How to use an electric breast pump

Electric breast pumps have two modes:

### Initiate mode

This is for stimulating your milk to come in.

1. Place the breast shield or funnel (flange) over your nipple.
2. Press the power button, then press the droplet button within 10 seconds.
3. To increase the suction, turn the dial clockwise until it feels slightly uncomfortable and then reduce the suction by two or three droplet or square icons, until it feels comfortable.
4. The pump will run for 15 minutes and then automatically switch off.

If you gave birth more than six days ago or you have expressed a combined volume (from both breasts) of 20ml or more for three consecutive expressions, you can begin using the 'maintain' mode.

### Maintain mode

This is for maintaining your milk supply.

1. Place the breast shield or funnel (flange) over your nipple.
2. Press the power button.
3. **Do not** press the droplet button until you see 'maintain running' on the screen.
4. To increase the suction, turn the dial clockwise until it feels slightly uncomfortable and then reduce the suction by two or three droplet or square icons, until it feels comfortable.
5. Continue expressing until your milk flow stops or there is a 10 second gap between each milk drop. The pump will not automatically stop.
6. To stimulate and increase your milk supply, continue expressing for a further two minutes after your milk flow stops.
7. Switch off the breast pump.

Breast compressions during pumping can also increase your milk output by a significant amount. To do breast compressions, form a 'C' shape with your whole hand and cup your breast towards your chest wall. Compress your breast tissue in a 'squeeze and release' motion and work your way round your breast.



Double pumping (expressing milk from both breasts at the same time) not only reduces time, but it also increases your milk supply and hormone levels.

If you are pumping each breast individually, switch breasts when your milk starts slowing down. Then swap back again as you may find you have more milk to express. You may find that one breast produces more milk than the other – this is normal.

## Funnel (flange) size

It is important that you choose the correct breast pump funnel size (the piece of plastic that fits over your nipple) for you. This will not only feel more comfortable for you, but it will also help you express milk as efficiently as possible. The Flange FITS Guide can help you to find the right funnel size for you. For more information about this, scan the QR code or visit:



[www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Docs/Services/Maternity/The-Flange-FITS-Guide-for-optimal-comfort-efficiency-and-milk-yield.pdf](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Docs/Services/Maternity/The-Flange-FITS-Guide-for-optimal-comfort-efficiency-and-milk-yield.pdf)

## Storing your expressed breast milk while your baby is in hospital

Once you have expressed your milk, label the syringe or the container with the date and time you expressed the milk and your baby's name. Your neonatal nurse or a member of the midwifery team can give you some name labels. Avoid using pens with ink that will smudge when wet.

Your milk should then be stored carefully to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. While your baby is in hospital, you are advised to follow the storage guidelines below:

- **Fridge** - Put your milk in the fridge as soon as you have finished expressing, unless you are planning to give it to your baby straight away. Expressed milk can be kept in the fridge for up to 48 hours in hospital.
- **Freezer** - If you are planning to freeze your milk, you should do this as soon as possible after expressing it (it must be done within 24 hours). Frozen milk can be kept in the freezer on the neonatal unit for up to three months.

Storing your milk in small quantities will help you to avoid wasting milk, especially if you plan to freeze it.

If you bring in expressed breast milk from home, please give it to your midwife or a neonatal nurse as soon as you arrive at the hospital. If you are travelling in from a distance, please use a cool bag and/or icepacks to keep your milk cool.

### Important safety information

- Infant feeding syringes have a free-fastening lid which must be removed before giving expressed colostrum or milk to your baby.
- Always keep syringes and lids away from babies and children.

## Expressing checklist

We have included the expressing checklist below to help guide you on your expressing journey.

### I have received:

- a bonding fabric heart (one for you and one for your baby if your baby is on the neonatal unit)
- a hand expressing admission pack
- an electric breast pump expressing kit

### I have been shown how to:

- hand express (including when to start and how often)
- use an electric breast pump (including when to use the different modes)
- check which breast pump funnel (flange) size to use
- wash and sterilise the expressing kit (and where to do this)
- sign up to vCreate (if your baby is on the neonatal unit)

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about expressing your breast milk, please speak to your midwife or neonatal nurse, or contact the relevant infant feeding team using the details below.

Neonatal infant feeding team  
Telephone: **07920 184353**

Maternity infant feeding team  
Telephone: **07786 267584**

If either of these teams are unable to answer your call, leave a voicemail with your name, number and a short message and a member of the team will aim to contact you within 48 hours.

## Useful links

[www.bliss.org.uk/parents/about-your-baby/feeding/breastfeeding](http://www.bliss.org.uk/parents/about-your-baby/feeding/breastfeeding)



[www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/breastfeeding-first-days](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/breastfeeding-first-days)



[www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding/expressing-breast-milk](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding/expressing-breast-milk)



[www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/feeding-your-baby/breastfeeding/expressing-your-breast-milk/expressing-breast-milk](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/feeding-your-baby/breastfeeding/expressing-your-breast-milk/expressing-breast-milk)



[www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding/premature-baby](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding/premature-baby)



[www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/off-to-the-best-start](http://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/off-to-the-best-start)



[www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Pregnancyandbirth/Your-medication-after-the-birth-of-your-baby.pdf](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Pregnancyandbirth/Your-medication-after-the-birth-of-your-baby.pdf)



# Join our family of Southampton Hospitals Charity supporters with a monthly donation!

Making a monthly donation is a wonderful way to show your ongoing support to patients and staff at University Hospital Southampton. Even a small amount can make a BIG difference!

- £5** could pay for a toy in the children's hospital waiting area
- £10** could pay for a sensory kit to help patients with dementia
- £25** could help pay for complimentary therapies for patients with cancer



The Direct Debit Guarantee. This guarantee should be retained by the payer.

- This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay Direct Debits. If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit Southampton Hospitals Charity will notify you (normally 10 working days) in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request Southampton Hospitals Charity to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request.
- If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit, by Southampton Hospitals Charity or your bank or building society, you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your bank or building society. If you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when Southampton Hospitals Charity asks you to.
- You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.

**\*Gift Aid Statement** – I am a UK Income or Capital Gains taxpayer. I have read this statement and want Southampton Hospitals Charity to reclaim tax on my donations. I understand that I must pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in the tax year at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities and Community Amateur Sports Clubs I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify.



## Yes, I would like to support the hospital with a monthly donation to Southampton Hospitals Charity

### 1. My details

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Forename: \_\_\_\_\_ Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please write your email address above if you'd like to receive updates on how your gift is helping as well as other ways you can help.

### 2. Regular giving

I would like to make a regular monthly gift of: £5  £10  £25  OR my choice of £

monthly by Direct Debit. Please debit my account on the following day of the month: 1st  15th

### 3. Make my gift worth an extra 25%

If you have not already done so, **please make every pound you give worth an extra 25% to the Charity at no extra cost to you by ticking this Gift Aid declaration.**

*giftaid it*

- Yes, I am a UK taxpayer and want to Gift Aid this donation and any donation I make in the future or have made in the past four years to Southampton Hospitals Charity
- No, I am not a UK taxpayer

I understand that, if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference. Please notify Southampton Hospitals Charity if you wish to cancel this donation, change your name or home address, or no longer pay sufficient income and/or Capital Gains Tax.

### 4. Instructions to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit

Name(s) of Account Holder(s):

Originator's Identification Number: 

6	9	1	2	1	3
---	---	---	---	---	---

Charities Aid Foundation, 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4TA

Account Number: 

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

 Sort Code: 

--	--	--	--	--	--



SCAN ME

Banks and Building Societies may not accept Direct Debit instructions from some types of account.

**Instruction to your Bank or Building Society.** Please pay Charities Aid Foundation re Southampton Hospitals Charity Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with Charities Aid Foundation re Southampton Hospitals Charity and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

Signature(s):

Date:

You can also set-up your monthly donation online via our website – [southamptonhospitalscharity.org/donate](https://southamptonhospitalscharity.org/donate) or by scanning the QR code.

### 5. What to do now

Please return this form to our Freepost address: Freepost RRUU-CSKX-JUBZ, Southampton Hospitals Charity, Mailpoint 135, Southampton General Hospital, Tremona Road, Southampton, SO16 6YD.

REG001

Charity Number: 1051543



If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **[www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport)**

**[www.uhs.nhs.uk](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk)**

© 2024 University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust. All rights reserved.  
Not to be reproduced in whole or in part without the permission of the copyright holder.

Version 1. Published July 2024. Due for review July 2027. 3251