

EXPRESSING BREAST MILK

Breast milk can be removed from the breast directly by your baby breastfeeding, by hand expression or with a breast pump.

This handout provides information about using breast pumps and expressing milk.

Why Some Parents Use a Breast Pump

- Baby cannot feed at the breast or is ineffective when breastfeeding
- Baby needs additional milk
- To increase milk production
- When choosing to give breast milk in another way
- If you are pumping for a baby who is not latching

Frequency is key — the more often milk is removed, the more milk your body will produce. Shorter, more frequent pumps can be more effective than pumping for longer periods fewer times a day.

- If your baby is not latching, aim to remove milk frequently, 8+ times in 24 hours, including overnight, to establish and maintain supply
- Milk removal at night plays a key role in supporting the hormone that drives milk production. Try to pump at least once between midnight and 5 a.m. if baby is not feeding directly from the breast
- Brief pumping sessions can make pumping feel more manageable — this is better than skipping entirely
- A second set of pump parts can be helpful to make pumping more manageable

HEALTH CONNECTION
1-800-361-5653
TTY: Dial 711
york.ca/Breastfeeding



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York Region

Choosing a breast pump

When choosing a pump, consider how often you will pump, your situation and cost.

Pump Type	Considerations for Use	Cost
Hospital Grade Electric Pump	• Ideal option soon after birth if separated from baby or if baby cannot remove milk from breast • Effective for establishing milk supply	\$90-\$150 a month rental plus pump kit*
Single or Double Electric Pump	• Suitable if your baby is at the breast some of the time and pumping is occasional • A double-sided pump allows you to pump both breasts at once, saving time • Some Double Electric Pumps may be appropriate for long term pumping	\$100-\$500 to purchase
Wearable “Hands Free” Pump	• Allows flexibility and the ability to do other activities while pumping • Can be harder to ensure correct positioning and to see milk output • May remove less milk than traditional pumps for some people	\$150-\$300 to purchase
Hand Expression or Manual/Hand Pump	• Best for occasional use once breastfeeding is well established and milk supply is adequate • Does not require electricity **Hand expression in the early days/hours after birth can be an effective strategy to help establish milk supply**	Free-\$60 to purchase
Passive Vacuum/Silicone Pump	• Intended for occasional use when breastfeeding is established and milk supply is adequate • Does not require electricity • If used incorrectly - as a milk collector during feeding, it may remove more milk than intended ○ This may contribute to challenges such as plugged ducts, mastitis or slower weight gain for your baby	\$20-\$70 to purchase

Using your pump effectively

- Start pumping in the stimulation phase (short, fast pulls) until milk is flowing, then switch to the expression phase (longer, deeper pulls)
- Switch back and forth between phases to encourage multiple releases of milk (let-down)
- Use the strongest suction that feels comfortable — reduce suction if it is painful
- Typical pumping sessions last 10-20 minutes (maximum 30 minutes)
- If you pump consistently over a long period, plan to replace pump parts, especially valves and other sealing components, every 4-8 weeks to maintain good suction
- If suction feels weak
 - Ensure all parts are properly connected with no gaps and check for holes or leaks from the hose through all the parts
 - Ensure your nipple is centered in the flange
 - Ensure your pump is plugged in or charged

Choosing the right flange size

Using the correct flange size is essential for comfort and effective milk removal.

- Pumping should feel comfortable and not painful
- Measure the nipple (tip only, not the areola) from side to side as a starting guide
- Use the smallest size that is comfortable, just your nipple should fit in the opening
- Often the standard size that comes with a pump is too large

Correct Fit — Nipple fits the flange and glides freely without areola or breast tissue being pulled in, milk releases well

Too large — Areola (darker area at the base of the nipple) is pulled into flange

Too small — Nipple feels pinched or cannot move freely

If your pump manufacturer does not have a size to fit you, flange inserts can be ordered online to make the diameter of your manufacturer flange fit you better.

- Flange inserts can be ordered in a kit of several sizes, so you can find the best fit

Cleaning your pump parts and storage containers

After the initial purchase of a breast pump, wash all parts in contact with expressed milk in hot soapy water, then sterilize them.

It is important to wash pump parts (that are in contact with milk) and containers after each use:

- Rinse pump parts and containers with cool water to remove milk residue. Then wash with warm, soapy water and rinse well with warm water. You can clean in a dishwasher if marked “dishwasher safe”
- Air dry or dry with a clean paper towel
- You do not need to wash tubing unless your pump manufacturer instructs you to

If breast milk freezer bags are used, they are sterile and ready to use. They are for one-time use only and cannot be reused.

Tips to remove more milk

- Sit comfortably and try to relax
- Pump both breasts at the same time when possible (double pumping)
- Before pumping, roll your nipples between your fingers and gently massage your breasts
- “Hands-on pumping” (gentle massage during pumping) and a few minutes of hand expression at the end of a session can increase milk removal
- If separated from your baby, smelling their clothing or looking at photos or videos can increase oxytocin and help with milk flow

Important Considerations

- Sharing breast pumps or buying used pumps is not considered safe. Most home-use pumps are not closed systems and cannot be safely cleaned
- Pumps have maximum cycle counts. An older or used pump may not remove milk effectively due to decreased motor function
- Traditional hand-held pumps are often more effective than wearable pumps

Health Connection

- For more parenting support or to speak with a registered nurse, contact Health Connection at **1-800-361-5653** or chat live at york.ca/NurseChat
- We provide free, confidential information, advice and resources, Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. After hours, leave a message, we will contact you during operating hours
- To learn more, visit york.ca/HealthConnection
- You can also call 811 to speak with a registered nurse 24/7 or chat live at ontario.ca/health811