

Breastfeeding management
FACT SHEET
 for health professionals

Breastfeeding multiples

In Australia, multiples account for approximately 2% of all births, and 63% of twins and 100% of all other multiples are born prematurely.

Expressing

When infants are born prematurely, mothers typically need to express to establish their milk supply. Ideally, expressing would start within the **first hour** after birth and regularly (eg every 2 to 3 hours) thereafter. Since colostrum is made in small volumes, **hand expressing** tends to work better than a pump in the first day or so, although some mothers find they express more by **combining** pumping with hand expressing to finish. Once secretory activation occurs (around day 3), many mothers switch to expressing with a **pump**, finishing with a few minutes or so of hand expressing that can help to remove more milk. For most mothers, expressing is faster and they can remove more milk with a hospital grade electric pump that allows **double pumping**. Hospital grade pumps can be **hired** from some local Australian Breastfeeding Association groups.

Breastfeeding positions

There are a variety of breastfeeding positions that mothers of multiples use. The most common for feeding twins is the 'football' or 'underarm' hold. Other options include parallel hold, crisscross hold, front 'v' hold, or breastfeeding lying down. See our booklet **Breastfeeding: twins, triplets and more** for photos of these different breastfeeding positions.

Breastfeeding infants together or separately

Mothers can breastfeed their infants together or separately. Everyone is different and there is no 'best' way that suits all. Many mothers find that how they breastfeed changes as their infants grow.

Breastfeeding babies separately

- Can be easier while learning to breastfeed.
- Means the mother has a hand free for other tasks (eg to have a drink or snack) while feeding.
- Can result in a mother spending more time feeding overall.
- Can be difficult for the mother to relax if more than one infant wants to feed and are crying.



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Resources

Brodribb, W. (ed) 2019, *Breastfeeding Management in Australia*. 5th ed. Australian Breastfeeding Association, Victoria.

Australian Breastfeeding Association 2019 **Breastfeeding: expressing and storing breastmilk** booklet.

Australian Breastfeeding Association 2020 **Breastfeeding: twins, triplets and more** booklet.

Australian Breastfeeding Association 2019 **Breastfeeding: your premature baby** booklet.



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Breastfeeding infants together

- Can satisfy and calm two infants simultaneously.
- Takes less time than feeding separately.
- Can be helpful if one infant sucks more strongly and triggers the milk-ejection reflex for the other infant who is still learning to breastfeed.
- May not work well for infants with very different feeding needs.
- May require help from a support person, especially in the early weeks.
- May mean that a mother has to wake her second infant to feed, leading to neither infant feeding well. However, many infants do adapt to feeding together.

Transitioning to direct breastfeeding

Gradually, infants born prematurely become more wakeful, waking more often on their own for feeds and more alert and vigorous with feeds. As this occurs, mothers can often start making a gradual transition from expressing to direct breastfeeding for all feeds.

Many mothers who have been expressing for a long time may feel that they are 'over' all the expressing. However, it's important they don't cease expressing too soon as it could result in their supply dropping, something they've worked so hard to build in the first place.

When transitioning from expressing to direct breastfeeding, techniques such as **breast compressions** and switch feeding (offering each breast twice or more at each feed and switching when the infant is no longer nutritively sucking despite breast compressions) can be helpful while monitoring signs of **adequate milk** intake. It can also help to inform mothers that if they have been expressing more milk than their infants needed that their supply may take a little while to regulate once their infants start transitioning to full direct breastfeeding.