

# How Breastfeeding Works



Australian  
Breastfeeding  
Association



**An illustrated guide**

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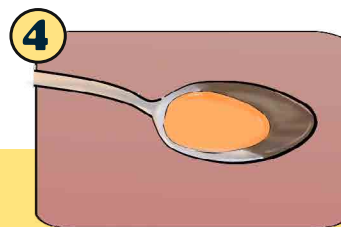
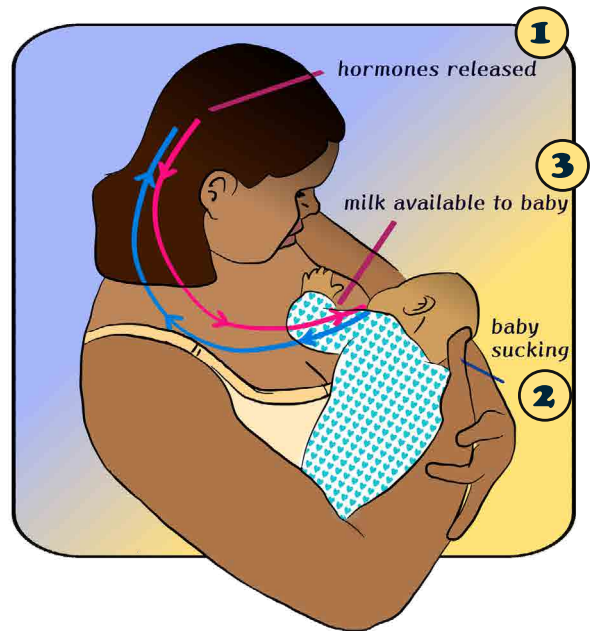
# How Breastfeeding Works

The more breastmilk your baby drinks, the more milk your breasts will make. Your body will send out a **message** ① when your **baby sucks** ② on your **breast**. This will tell your body to **make breastmilk** and let it flow. ③

The first breastmilk you make will be thick and yellow. It's called **colostrum** ④.

It is important to feed your baby this milk as it will protect your baby from getting sick.

Your breastmilk will slowly become thinner and turn a **bluish-white colour** ⑤. Your breastmilk will still have everything your baby needs to grow and feel full.



## Here is how to tell if your milk is flowing properly:

- At the start of a feed, your baby will suck quickly. Once the milk is flowing your baby will suck and swallow more slowly. The baby will pause from time to time and then start to suck and swallow again.
- You may feel tingling or 'pins and needles' in your breast.
- Sometimes your breasts may feel full and the other breast may leak milk.
- You may feel thirsty.

## The way you feel can change how your milk flows

For example, if you feel tired, tense or shy your milk may flow slowly. Being relaxed will help your milk flow better.

Make yourself comfortable. Have a drink and healthy snack near you.

Express a few drops of milk before putting your baby to your breast.

Gently massage your breast while feeding your baby.

Make sure your baby is positioned correctly. See Section



### Your baby is getting enough breastmilk if:

- Your baby is feeding whenever they want, day or night. Sometimes your baby will feed 10–12 or more times in 24 hours.
- In 24 hours, babies should wet their nappy 5 or more times and also have 3 or more soft poos. As babies get older, they may poo less often.
- Your baby is awake, moving around and happy.
- Weigh your baby every 2 or 3 weeks. Your baby should put on weight over this time.
- Your baby's head and body will grow.

# Putting baby to your breast

Let your baby follow its natural instincts. This is called 'baby-led attachment'. You can start this as soon as your baby is born or any time afterwards. Sit comfortably. Support your back and lean backwards.

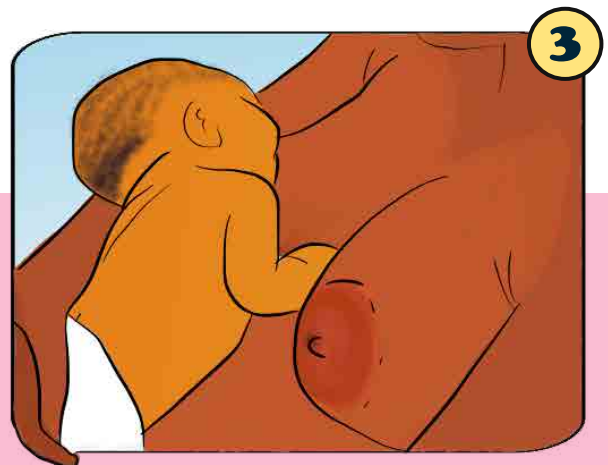
Start when your baby is awake and calm. Take off your baby's clothes but leave the nappy on. Take off your top and bra. You can wear something on your shoulders if you are cold or need privacy.



**Put your baby upright between your breasts. Talk to your baby. Look into the baby's eyes. Gently touch the baby.**

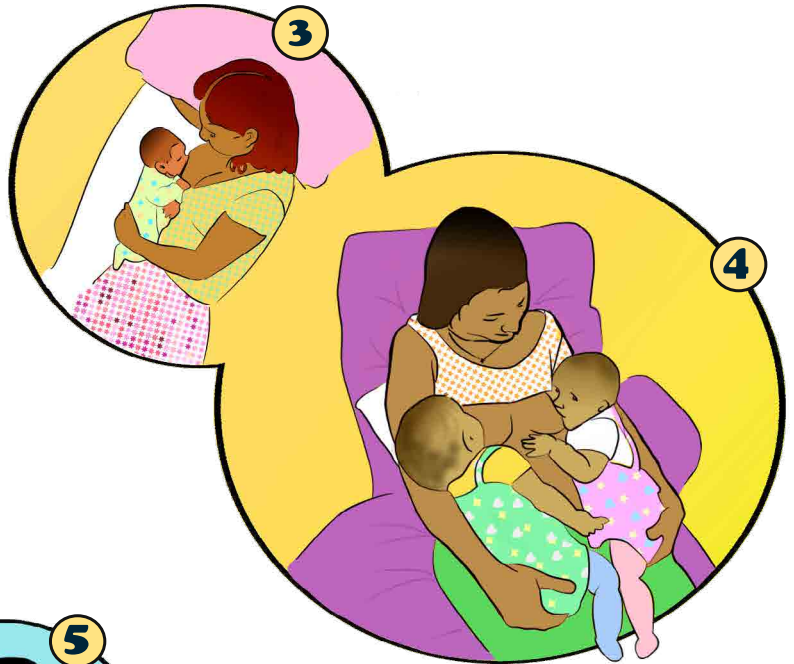


**Gently support your baby's shoulders and bottom. Your baby may bob around on your chest before moving to your breast.**



**When your baby's chin touches your breast, your baby may attach without help. Don't rush things. Enjoy your baby.**





**Breastfeeding positions:**

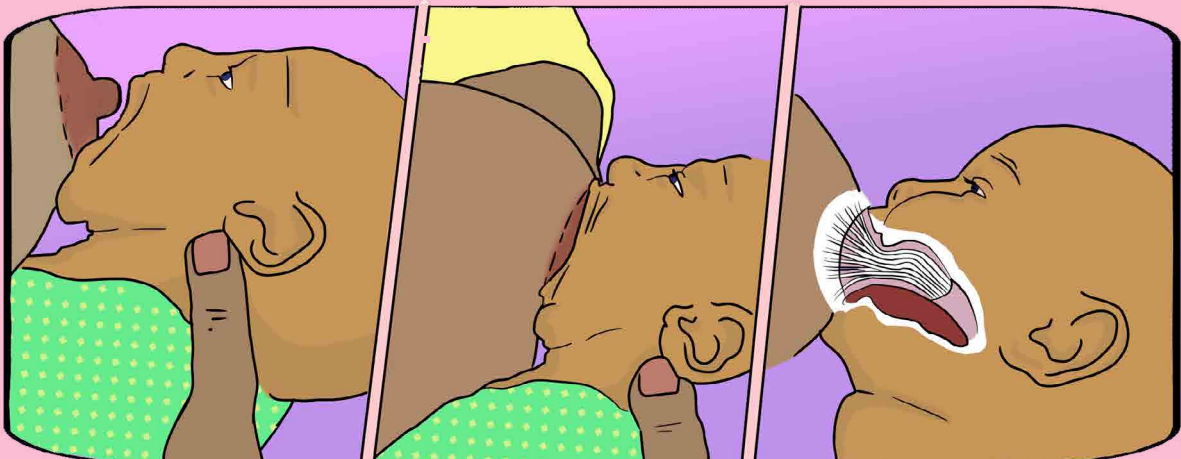
- ① underarm (football) hold
- ② straddle hold
- ③ lying down
- ④ 'laid back' breastfeeding
- ⑤ cradle hold
- ⑥ cross cradle hold



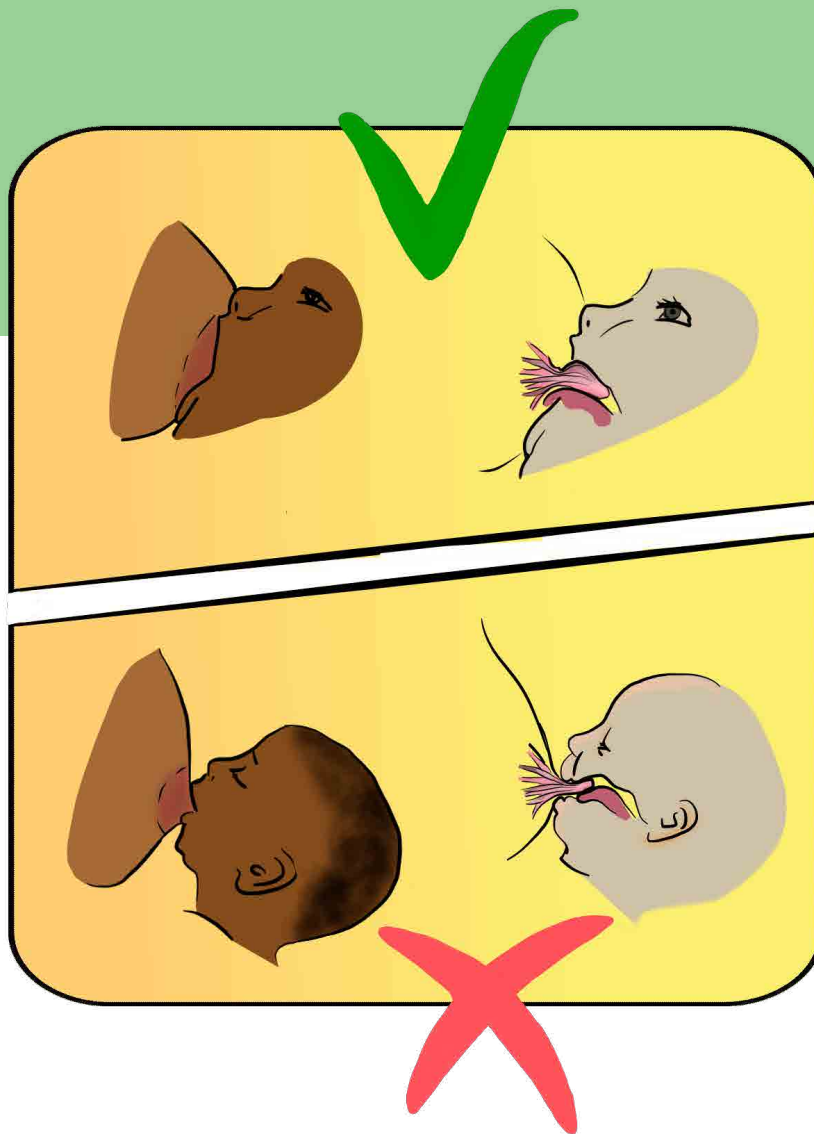
## Breastfeeding positions

### The staff at the hospital may teach you a different way to breastfeed:

- Find a comfortable bed or chair. You can put pillows behind your back for support.
  - Hold your baby close with baby's body facing you. Support the baby's shoulders and neck.
  - Let the baby's head tip back a little bit. Move your baby's lower arm out the way or put it around your waist.
  - Your baby's body should curl around yours with their neck stretched out slightly.
- Your baby's **nose** should be at the **same level** as your **nipple**. Bring your **baby** to your **breast**.
  - Lean backwards a bit to help your baby come closer to your breast. The baby's **chin** should touch your breast first. This teaches your baby to open wide and then attach.
  - Hold your breast and point your nipple to the roof of the baby's mouth. When your baby's mouth is wide open, attach your baby. Your baby should have a **large mouthful** of breast and have their chest against your chest and chin to breast.







You and your baby will **learn** to breastfeed over time. It is **normal** to feel unsure when you are learning something new. Breastfeeding will become **easier** with **practice**. The midwives are there to help you. Do not be afraid to ask for help.

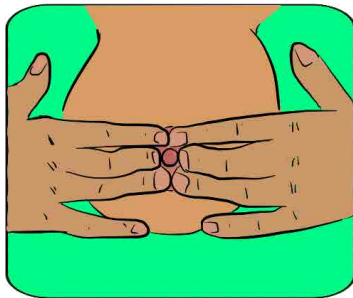
- If it doesn't feel right, put your finger between the baby's gums and pull down gently to break the suction. Take the baby off your breast. Make sure your hands are clean before you do this.
- Many mothers get nipple pain when they start learning to breastfeed. Ask for help if the pain lasts for more than 10 seconds or your nipple is damaged.

# Too much milk

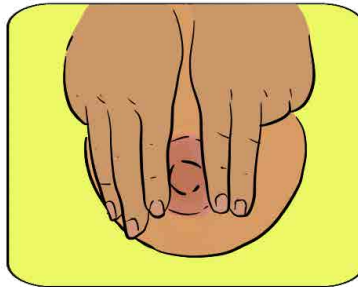
Two or three days after your baby's birth, your milk starts changing. It goes from **thick** and **yellow** milk called **colostrum** to **thin** and **bluish-white breastmilk**. Sometimes when this change happens, there can be lots of milk and more blood flow to the breasts. Your breasts may feel tight, hard and uncomfortable.

This is called **engorgement**. If you let your baby breastfeed when baby wants to, the fullness quickly goes away. This means that the right amount of milk is there for your baby. Tell the nurses if your breasts become too full or uncomfortable. Get a lactation consultant or midwife to make sure your baby is feeding well.

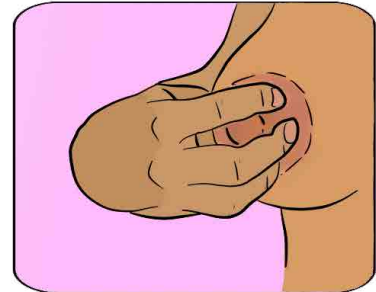
## Positions for softening your breasts:



horizontal fingers



vertical fingers

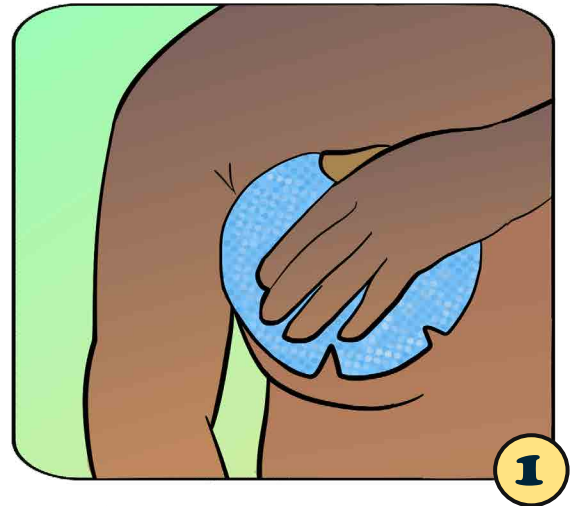


'flower' hold

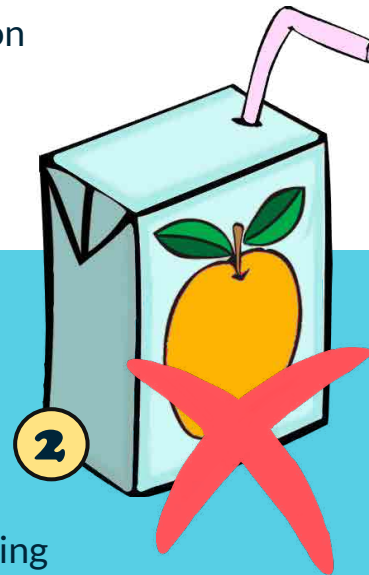
## What can be done to help

- It may be hard for your baby to attach onto a full breast. Express some milk with your hand before breastfeeding your baby. You can also use your fingers to press your breast around the nipple. Press with **your fingers** for 2–3 minutes or until your breast gets softer (see above for softening techniques).
- **Warm up** your breasts for a few minutes before breastfeeding. This can help your breastmilk flow.

- After breastfeeding, you can **cool down** your breasts to help with pain and swelling. Place cold face washers wet with water, a cold pack or a frozen disposable nappy on your breasts. **1**
- **Only give your baby breastmilk.** **2**  
Giving your baby anything else to drink will mean that your baby won't want as many breastfeeds. Breastfeed often as this will help the engorgement go away.
- Wake your baby up for a feed if your breasts are too full and uncomfortable.
- If your breasts are red or sore, or you see lumps, you may have blocked ducts and mastitis. See Section
- Take your bra off before breastfeeding.



- If your breasts are very full, empty your breasts just once with a breast pump. Your breasts usually become less full after the first week of breastfeeding.



Sometimes your breasts can get full if your baby's feeding pattern changes. For example, if your baby sleeps through the night, you wean your baby too quickly, or your baby is sick.

## What to do about too much breastmilk

After the first weeks of breastfeeding, some mothers still have too much milk.

- Empty one breast first. Let your baby choose how long to breastfeed. Your baby may not want both breasts every time.
- Make sure your baby is attached properly. See Section of this book *Putting baby to your breast*.
- Only express your breastmilk for your comfort or to help your baby to attach properly.

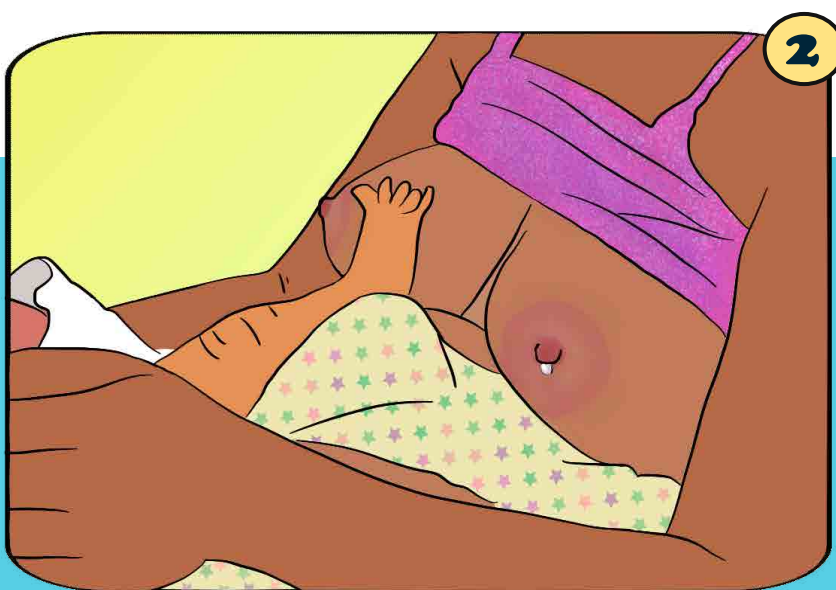


Try these tips for a few days. If you still have problems you can try to breastfeed only every 2–3 hours, swapping sides each time, to help control how much breastmilk your body makes. To **comfort** your baby without breastfeeding, you can **rock** and **cuddle**. If your baby is still **hungry**, you could try feeding from only **one breast** for a few hours and then switch to the **other breast** for a few hours. Once the amount of breastmilk is less, you can then breastfeed from both breasts.

## If your baby has trouble drinking a fast flow of milk



- **Lie back** to breastfeed. ❶ You may only need to do this in the morning.
- **Express** the first fast flow of breastmilk.
- Take your **baby off your breast** until the flow slows down. ❷
- If your breasts are **red** or **sore**, or you see **lumps**, you may have **blocked ducts** or **mastitis**.



# Making more milk

Mothers make more milk when their baby sucks at the breast. The **more often** you **breastfeed**, the **more breastmilk** you will **make**. Feed your baby every 1, 2 or 3 hours, or when the baby seems upset or hungry.

Your growing baby may get unsettled and want to breastfeed more often. People used to think that the baby was going through a growth spurt and needed more milk. But now, we know that this is not true.



A baby drinks the same amount of milk each day from 1–6 months old.

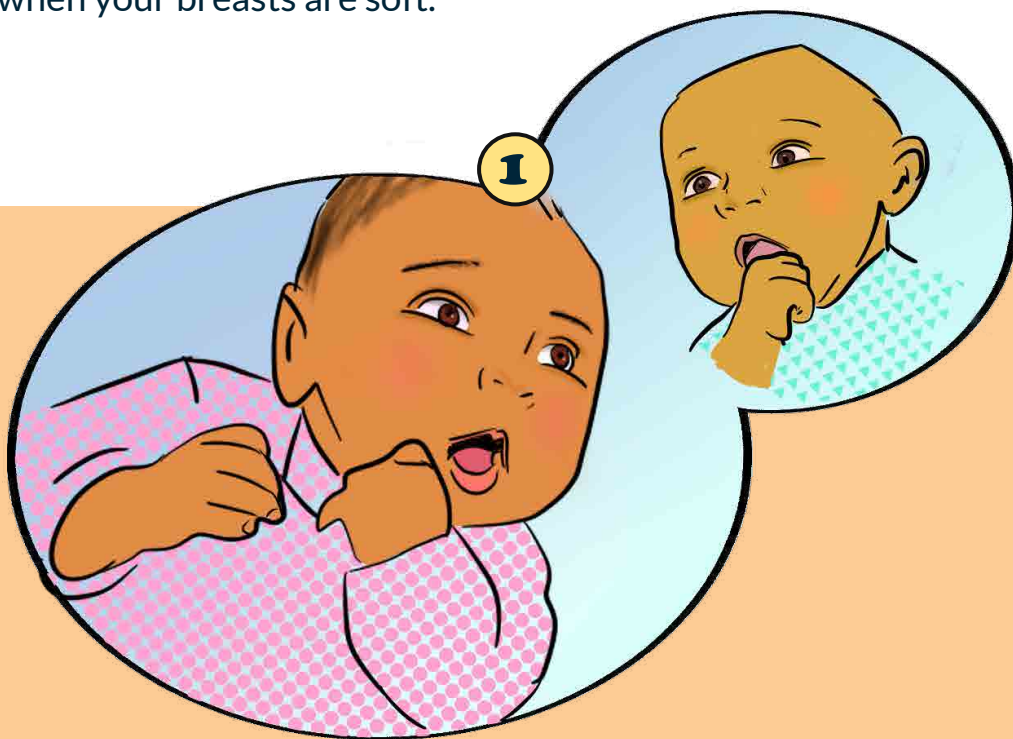
Listen to your baby. Breastfeed your baby more and give your baby more cuddles for a few days.

Many mothers notice their breasts get smaller and softer after breastfeeding for a few weeks. ❶ This doesn't mean that your milk is disappearing. Your breasts are just getting better at making milk.



## What can I do to make more milk?

- **Feed more** often. 12 times a day or more is good.
- Use your **breast** instead of a dummy to help your baby relax.
- Try not to wait too long in between the times you breastfeed.
- Feed your baby when your baby is **awake and relaxed**. ❶ **Don't** wait for the baby to **cry**.
- Wake your baby up and feed your baby before you go to bed.
- Every time you feed your baby, give your baby each breast two or more times.
- It's easier to feed your baby when your baby is in a good position and the baby's mouth is wide open. See
- Give a 'top-up' breastfeed. This means feeding your baby again 20–30 minutes after the last time. This will help you make more milk. Your breasts are never empty because your body is always making milk. Your body makes more milk when your breasts are soft.



- If your baby doesn't want extra milk, express milk between and after breastfeeding.
- If you need to use a bottle to feed your baby, try to only use breastmilk. You can also use a **small cup**<sup>1</sup> to give your baby milk. Even very young babies can do this. You will make less milk if you give other types of milk to your baby.
- Rest as much as you can. Eat well and drink when you are thirsty. You will make more milk when you are relaxed.
- Massaging your breasts when you breastfeed may also help you.



- Cuddle your baby **skin-to-skin** to help your body make more milk.<sup>2</sup>
- Smoking affects how much milk you make. If you smoke, try to give up or smoke less.

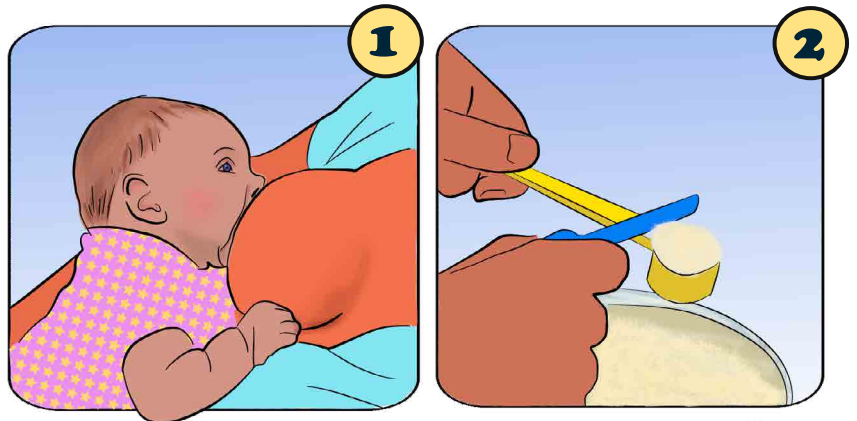


## How do I know if my baby is getting enough milk?

See [page 12](#) for tips. If you have tried all these tips and there is still not enough milk for your baby, talk to your doctor or child health nurse or lactation consultant. You can phone the Breastfeeding Helpline 1800 686 268 (see back cover). Some women have health issues that make it hard for them to make all the milk their baby needs. But they can usually make some milk for their baby.

## The top-up feed

Your doctor or nurse may tell you to give a top-up feed for health reasons. Your baby may not be feeding well or you may not be making enough breastmilk. The tips below will help you give your baby a top-up feed.



- A top-up feed means giving your baby expressed breastmilk or formula. **Always breastfeed ① before giving your baby formula. ② Giving your baby formula will make your baby less hungry for breastmilk. It may also reduce how much breastmilk you make.**
- Try giving your baby both breasts and change sides often. Try breastfeeding your baby again 20–30 minutes later. Use a small cup instead of a bottle to give your baby a top-up feed. This way, your baby is not getting used to drinking from a bottle.

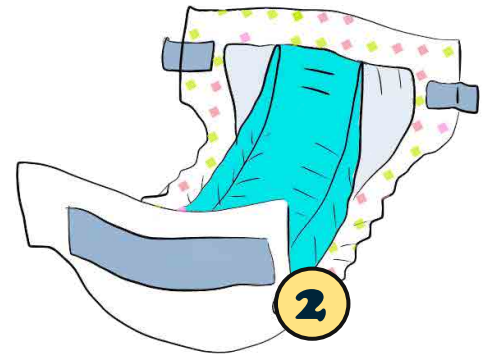
- You could use a breastfeeding supplementer. ③ This means you can give your baby extra milk through a fine tube at your breast. This is good to use if you need to give extra milk for a long time.
- Ask your health professional how much extra milk you should give your baby.
- Express your breastmilk as many times as you can between feeding your baby. Save it to use as a top-up later ( ).



## How can I tell if my body is making more breastmilk?

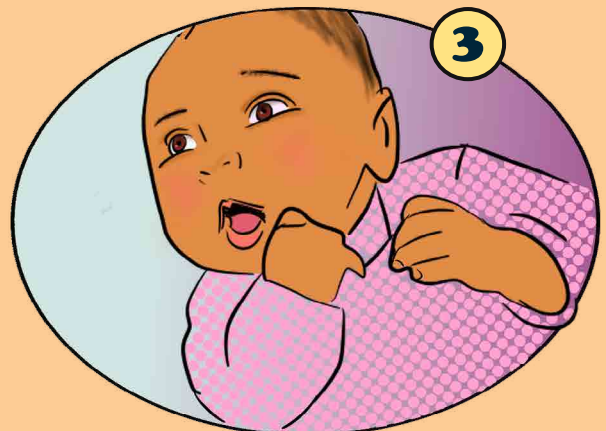
Some of these things may happen:

- your breasts may **feel fuller**
- your milk will start flowing more quickly than before
- you may **leak** milk<sup>①</sup>
- your baby will have more **wet nappies**<sup>②</sup>
- your baby puts on weight with fewer top-up feeds.



### How do I stop top-up feeds and go back to full breastfeeding?

- Try giving fewer top-up feeds. If your baby seems happy with just breastmilk you can skip the top-up. Your baby may want to feed again sooner than before. Breastfeed when your baby shows **hunger signs**,<sup>③</sup> then try a top-up feed if your baby still seems hungry.
- The hardest top-up feeds to stop are usually in the afternoon or evening.
- Some mothers may need to give top-up feeds for a long time.



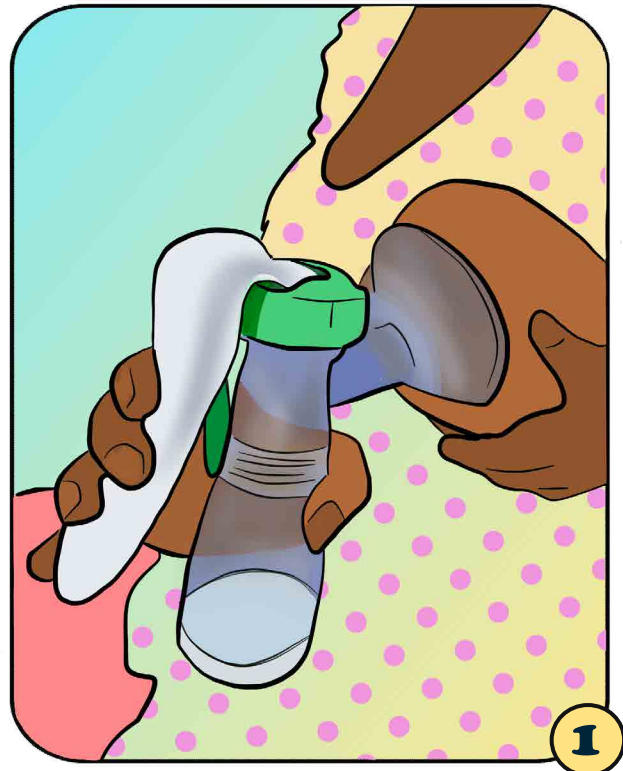


# How to express breastmilk

Expressing is when a mother gently milks her breasts to get breastmilk out. You can do this with a **breast pump**<sup>1</sup> or with your **hand**<sup>2</sup>

Why would you need to **express** your breastmilk?

- if you need to go out and leave your baby
- if you are going back to work
- if your baby can't or won't breastfeed
- if your baby is premature
- if you or your baby are in hospital
- if you need to make more breastmilk



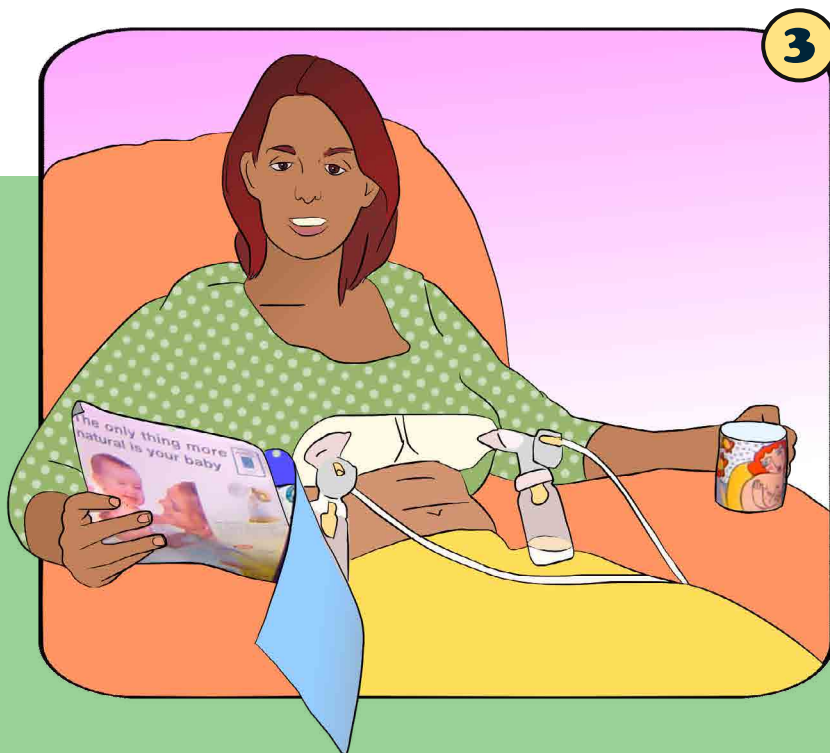
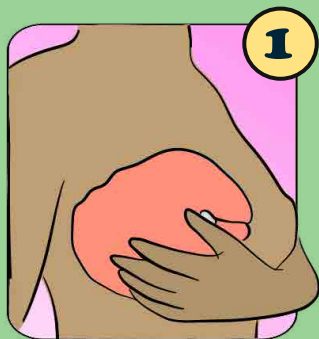
- if your breasts are too full and uncomfortable
- if you have a blocked duct or mastitis.

## General tips: expressing breastmilk

To express your milk you need to get a 'let down'. This is when your breasts release the milk in a big rush. You may see milk spray from many small openings on your nipple.

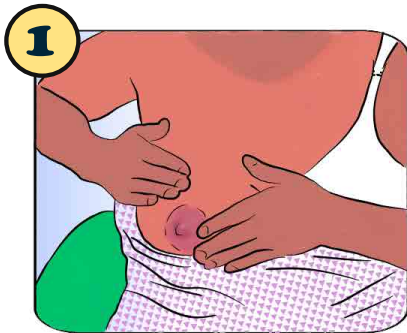
These tips will help :

- Sit comfortably.
- Breathe deeply and relax your body.
- Warm your breasts with a warm cloth. **1**
- Massage your breast towards the nipple before and while expressing.
- Gently roll your nipple between your fingers.
- Think about your baby. You can look at photos of your baby. **2**
- Have a routine when you express your milk. Try making a drink and sitting in the same chair each time. You can listen to music or watch TV. **3**





## Step by step: How to express using your hand



- Your hands may get tired at the start. Change hands and breasts often to rest them. Your hands will become stronger with practice.
- Use a big, clean bowl to catch your breastmilk.
- Put a clean towel over your knees to catch drips. Wash and dry your hands.

**1** To help the milk to flow use a warm pack to warm the breast and massage the breast with warm hand.

**2** Put four fingers under your breast. Put your thumb on top of your breast, a few centimetres from your nipple. Press your thumb back slightly, towards your chest. Squash your breast a little bit by pushing your thumb towards the fingers under your breast on the other side.

**3** Squeeze your breast. Breastmilk may squirt out. Keep squeezing the breast like a baby sucking until the flow of breastmilk stops.

**4** Move your hand around your breast. Keep doing this until the flow slows down. Then start on the other breast.

## Being clean is very important

Properly wash and rinse all containers. See Section of this book for instructions.

- Make sure to **wash your hands** well with soap and water.
- Express into big bowl.
- Pour your breastmilk into a clean container. Put the lid on and write the date on it.



Expressing your breastmilk by hand is like your baby sucking. With practice you will become very fast. Don't measure how much breastmilk you make just by what you express. Your baby can get more milk from your breasts than you can get by expressing.

Ask the midwives to show you how to express or ask an [Australian Breastfeeding Association counsellor](#).

## Breast pumps

- If you only express your breastmilk sometimes, you can use a manual breast pump. You can get them from pharmacies, online or from the Australian Breastfeeding Association.
- You can buy or rent different types of electric breast pumps. You can get ones for expressing breastmilk only sometimes, or ones you can use more often. There are also pumps that are used in hospitals. These are good to use if you need to pump many of your baby's feeds each day.

# How to store breastmilk

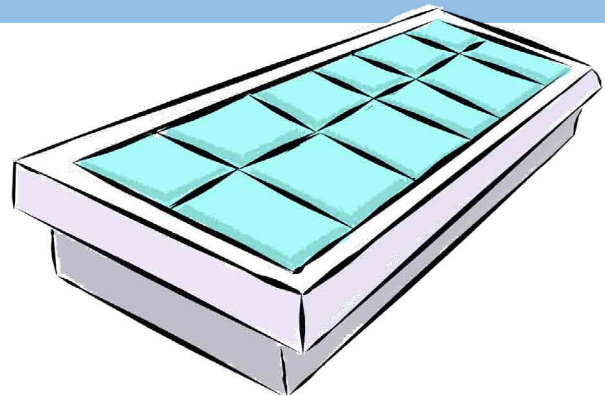
Cool the milk in the fridge, freeze and store breastmilk properly.

There are two ways to store breastmilk:

**Chilled milk:** You can keep your breastmilk in the fridge at 4°C for 3 days before use.

**Frozen milk:** You can keep your breastmilk in the freezer section of your fridge for 2 weeks. You can keep your breastmilk in a freezer for 3 months.

You can keep your breastmilk in a deep freezer (below -20°C) for 6–12 months.



You can freeze your breastmilk in an **ice block tray**. Once frozen, store your breastmilk in good quality freezer bags.

**Write the date** on the bags. **1** Defrost only as much as you need. If you don't heat up all of the defrosted breastmilk, you can keep it in your fridge for 24 hours.

Once defrosted, you can keep your breastmilk in the fridge. If you don't keep it in the fridge, you must use it in **4 hours**.

**Do not** put defrosted breastmilk back in the freezer.

Only **warm up small amounts at a time**. Do not warm up breastmilk again if your baby doesn't finish it.

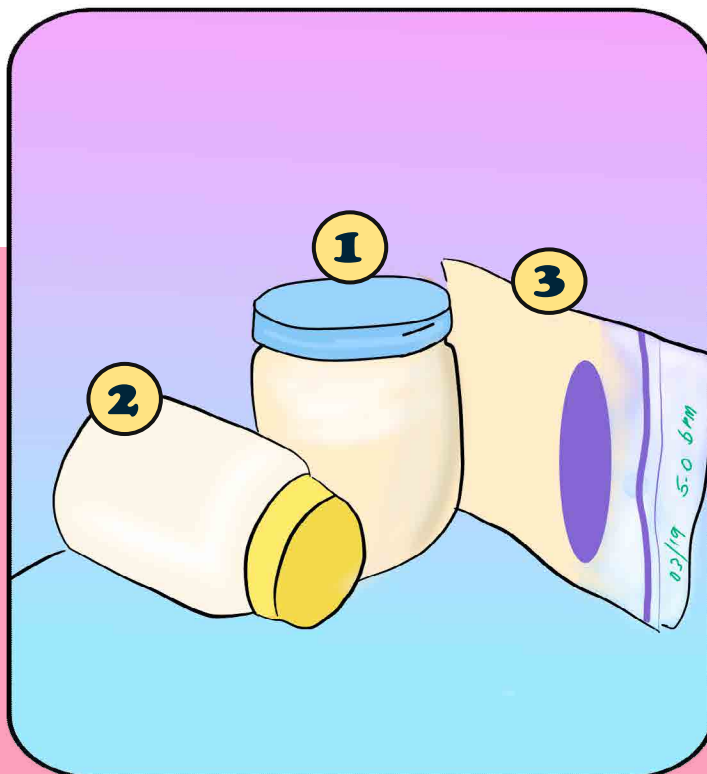


## Storing breastmilk

Store your breastmilk in clean containers. Wash them properly with hot water and detergent. Rinse them well with clean water and dry them with paper towel or leave them to air dry.

These **containers** are good for storing breastmilk:

- plastic baby bottles ①
- freezable plastic cups or containers with lids ②
- small baby food jars made of glass
- special breastmilk freezer bags. ③ You can get these from pharmacies, baby stores and online.



Check with your hospital about containers for your breastmilk. Some hospitals will give mothers containers for breastmilk if their baby is premature.

If you are **expressing** breastmilk many times a day and your baby is healthy, it is ok to not wash the pump every time if you store your breast pump parts in a plastic bag or closed container in the fridge.

If you do not have a fridge, rinse parts of your breast pump with cold water and store them in a clean, closed container. If your baby is sick, ask your doctor or nurse if extra steps are needed to clean and store your pump parts.

If you only use your breast pump sometimes, wash after each use.

**Contact your child health nurse or counsellor for help.**

At least once a day wash the parts of your breast pump well. Rinse all the parts with cold water first and then wash with hot water and detergent. Rinse well with clean water. Dry with paper towel or leave out to dry. ❶



## Freezing your breastmilk

- Write the **date** on the container.
- Cool your breastmilk in the **fridge first**. ❶
- Once the breastmilk is cold, put it in the **coldest part** of the freezer. ❷
- If you want to add your fresh expressed milk to your frozen milk, cool your expressed milk in the fridge first.
- Your breastmilk will **expand** when it freezes. Don't fill the container all the way to the top.

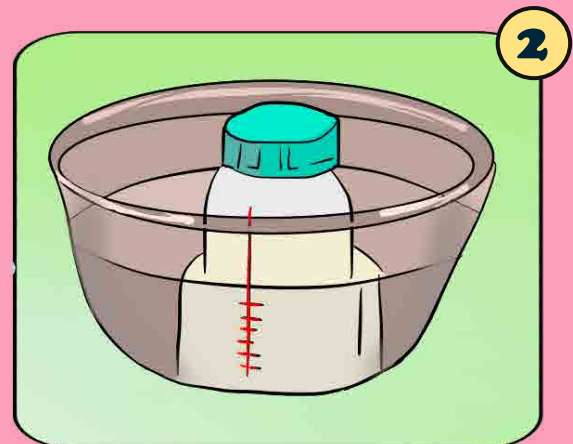




## Defrosting and warming up milk

You can defrost your frozen breastmilk in the fridge for 24 hours. You can also warm it up straight away. Do NOT keep your breastmilk at room temperature.

- Put the container of frozen breastmilk under cold water from the tap. Slowly, make the water warmer until the breastmilk turns into liquid. **1**
- Put the container of chilled or defrosted milk in warm water until it is body temperature. **2**
- Do not use a microwave to heat or defrost breastmilk. This can damage it. Some babies have been burnt because the microwave made parts of the milk extremely hot.
- **Important:** You can store your breastmilk after defrosting it in the fridge for 24 hours. You can only do this if you didn't warm the milk up before.
- If you do not put the breastmilk that you defrosted back in the fridge, you must use it in 4 hours. Do not freeze your breastmilk if it has already been frozen before.
- Do not warm up breastmilk again if your baby doesn't finish it. Only warm up small amounts at a time.



# Sore and cracked nipples

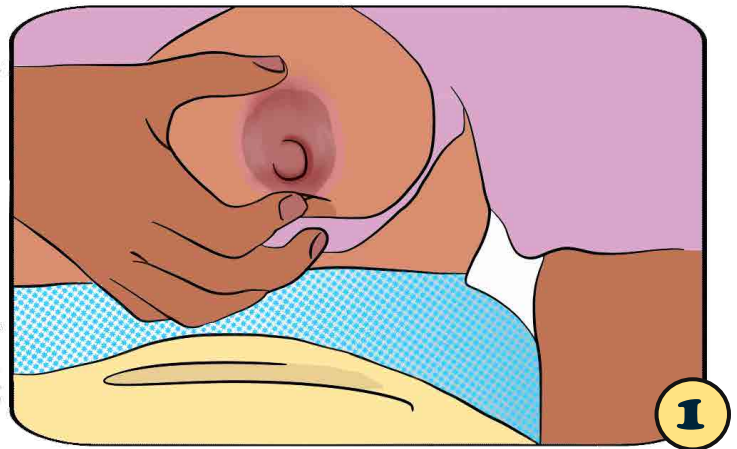
Many new mothers get nipple pain when they start to breastfeed. With help, your nipple pain can get better.

## What you can do to help nipple pain:

Try to feed your baby often. It will help your baby relax and suck more gently.

## Before feeding your baby:

- Make yourself comfortable. Relax and breathe deeply.
- **Massage** your breasts gently.
- Have a warm shower or use a warm face washer on your breasts.
- **Express** some milk. ① This will make your nipple softer and help your milk flow.
- Ask your doctor for help if you can't relax because of pain .

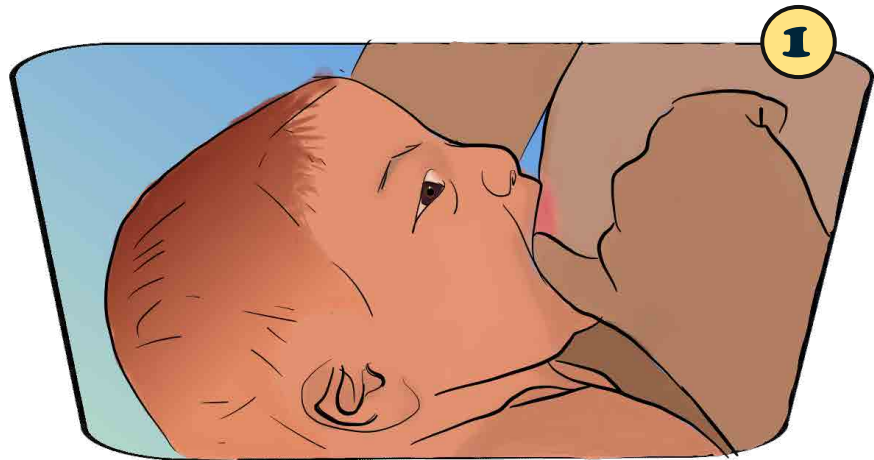


## When you feed your baby:

- Give your baby the less sore side first.
- Make sure you are holding your baby properly: chest to chest, chin to breast (see [this page](#)). If the baby is in the wrong position, your nipples can hurt more.
- If your nipples are still sore, offer shorter more frequent feeds.

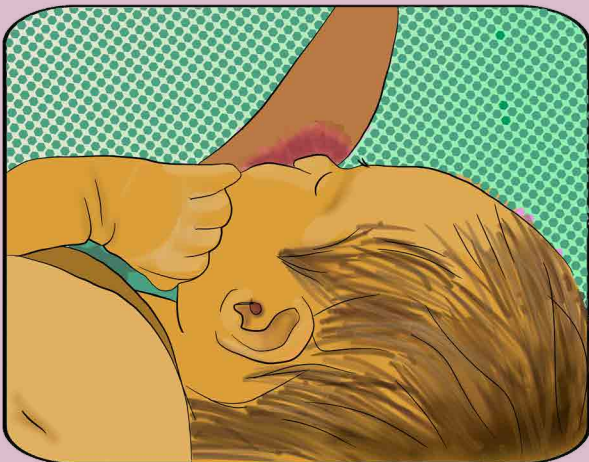
## After feeding your baby

- Express some milk and rub it on your nipple and around the nipple.
- Keep your nipples dry. Let them dry in the air. Change your nursing pads often. Leave your bra off for a while.
- Use nipple protectors. This will stop clothes rubbing on your nipples and let air move around.



### To prevent nipple pain

- If you need to take your baby off your breast, **use your finger** to open baby's mouth before you take your nipple out. ❶ Make sure your hands are clean.
- Don't use anything that will dry your nipples. For example, methylated spirits, shampoo, rough towels or tooth brushes.



## What to do when you have cracked nipples

Find out why you have cracked nipples. It may be because the baby is in the wrong position when you breastfeed. Or you may have an infection. Or something is going wrong with your breast pump.

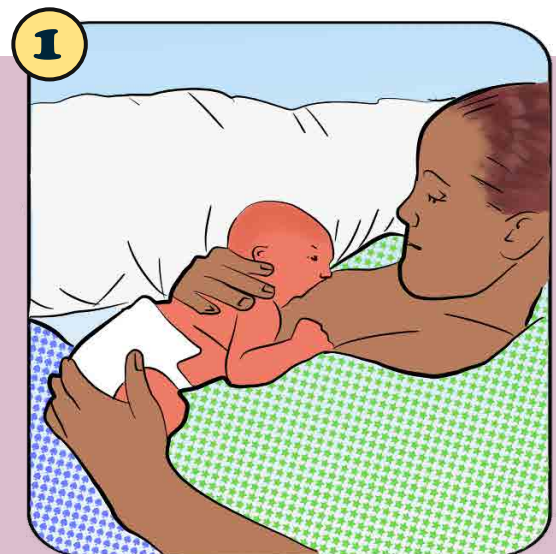
Try the tips for nipple pain. It is important to **position** your baby in the right way. **1** Let air move around your nipples after feeding your baby.

Is feeding your baby too **painful**? First ask for help and if needed you can take a break from breastfeeding for a few hours, or a whole day to rest your nipples. **Express** your breastmilk to **feed** to your baby. **2** After a break from breastfeeding, return to breastfeeding slowly. Try giving a breastfeed for one feed and then expressing your milk to give at the next feed.



Give more breastfeeds each day until you aren't doing any more feeds with expressed milk.

See your doctor if your healing is slow or you need pain medicine. If you need more help, talk to the hospital, a child health nurse or an ABA counsellor.



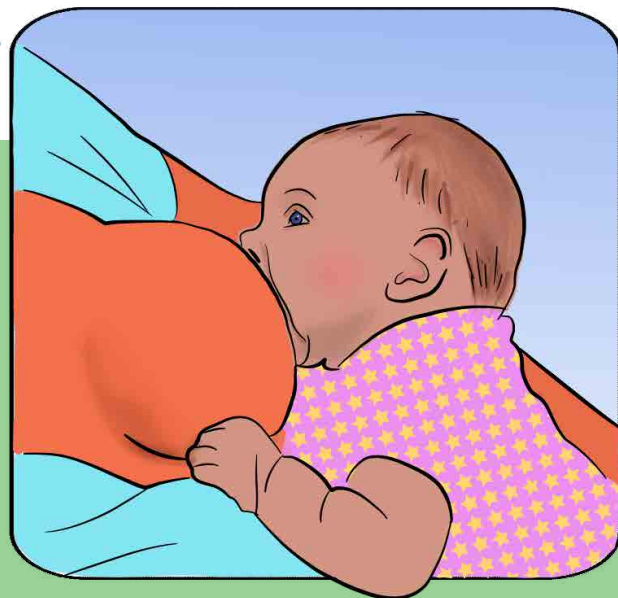
# Mastitis and blocked ducts

## Blocked ducts

A blocked duct is a lumpy or swollen area of the breast. It may be sore and red. There may be pain when you breastfeed. It is important to get help straight away. If you don't, it can lead to mastitis.

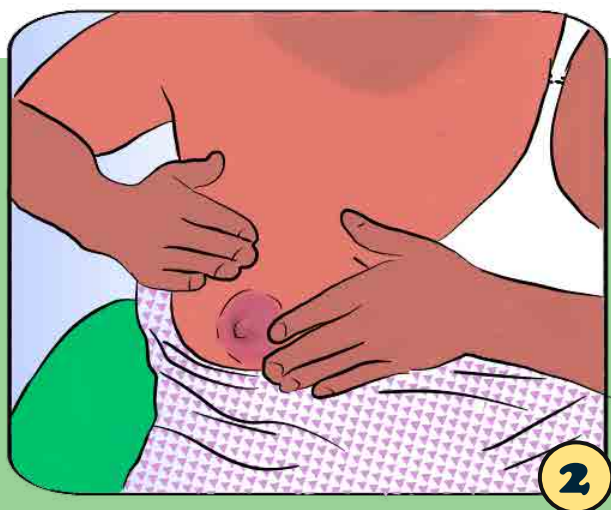
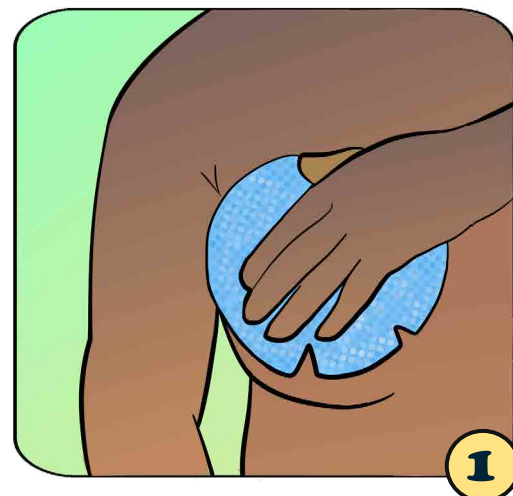
### Things to do:

- Feed your baby often from your sore breast.
- Keep it as empty as you can. Many blocked ducts are fixed by the baby's sucking. Start feeding on the sore breast each time.
- Your baby sucks the strongest at the start of a feed. Check your other breast for lumps and swollen areas.





- Try a different feeding position. Point your baby's chin towards the sore area. This can help move the lump.
- You can put a **heat pack** on your sore breast for a few minutes before breastfeeding. This can make your milk flow better.
- You can put a **cold pack** ❶ on your breast after breastfeeding to help with pain and swelling.
- Rest as much as you can.
- If your baby won't breastfeed or it is too painful, express your breastmilk with your hand or a pump.
- See a doctor if the lump doesn't go away in a few days, if you get a fever or feel sick.



When you feed your baby, gently but firmly massage your breast from behind the lump towards the nipple. ❷

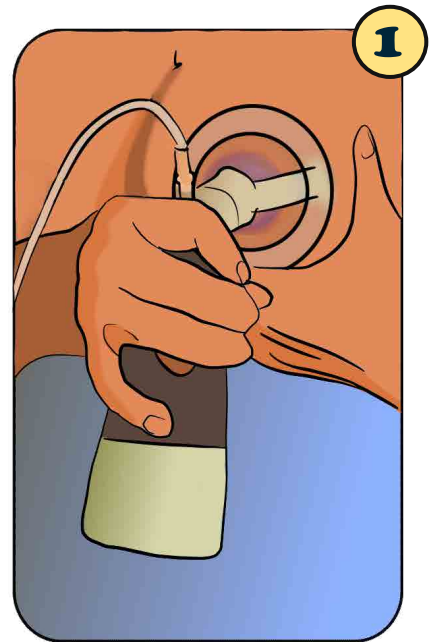


# Mastitis

Mastitis is when a large area of your breast is swollen. Sometimes you can get an infection. Your breast can be red, swollen, hot and painful. Your breast skin can be shiny, with red streaks. You may get a high temperature or feel like you have flu. **Keep breastfeeding your baby.** If you don't get help for mastitis, it can cause a breast abscess.

## Things to do:

- **Get help straight away.**
- Keep using the above tips for a blocked duct.
- Go to bed and rest if you can. **Express** your breastmilk with hand or a pump to help keep your breast empty. **1**
- Breastfeed **often** to keep your breast empty. Your **breastmilk** is **safe** for your baby.



- Start feeding with the sore breast first while your baby is sucking strongly.
- **Speak to your doctor or nurse.**
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you need pain medicine.

## How can I prevent mastitis?

### Tips:

- Take your time when breastfeeding.
- Don't let your breasts become too full.
- Try not to wear tight bras or clothes. Don't sleep on your stomach.
- Look after your health and try not to stress.

### Remember:

- Get help straight away.
- See a doctor straight away if the blocked duct doesn't go away in a few days. See your doctor if you get a fever, feel sick or your breast becomes fuller or harder. **1**

Contact your child health nurse or [Australian Breastfeeding Association \(ABA\)](#) counsellor for more help.



# Working and breastfeeding

You can go back to work or study when you are breastfeeding. Many women do. Breastmilk is important for your baby. It's better to breastfeed your baby a little bit than not at all.

## Ways you can work and breastfeed: Baby between 6 weeks and 6 months.

### OPTION 1: Breastfeed your baby

- Have the baby at work with you.
- Your carer could bring the baby to you or message you to come and feed the baby.
- Find child care close to your work so you can go to child care to feed your baby.



### OPTION 2: When you are at work

- You can leave your breastmilk in a bottle or cup for the carer to feed your baby. **1** If you work all day, you may need to leave the carer enough milk to feed your baby two or more times.
- Feed your baby before you leave child care and breastfeed again when you get to child care.



- At work, you may need to express your milk every 3–4 hours or if your breasts feel very full and uncomfortable. You can express your breastmilk during breaks and keep it for the next day. Store your breastmilk in a fridge **1** or a cooler bag.



### OPTION 3: Buy formula.

- Only for your baby to have when you are at work. **When you are with your baby, breastfeed often.**



## Options for a baby over 6 months

Leave expressed breastmilk and solid food for your baby.

Give your baby **formula** and **solid food** when you are at **work** and **breastmilk** when you are at **home**.

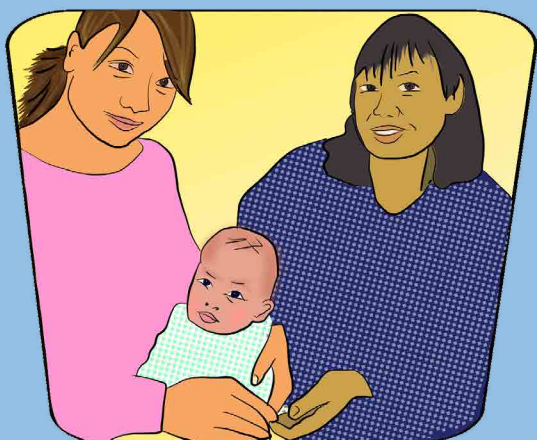
## Common questions

### Does breastfeeding mean my baby won't take a bottle?

Some mothers worry that their baby may not feed from a bottle. They worry this will be a problem when they go back to work.

It can take time for baby to get used to a bottle. Try offering a bottle of expressed breastmilk one or two times a week. If your baby won't take the bottle, try again in a few days. Ask the carer to feed your baby with a bottle when your baby can't see you. This is a good way to get your baby used to change.

Some mothers like to teach their baby to drink from a **cup** <sup>1</sup> instead of a bottle. For small babies, use a small cup. Older babies (6 months or more) like to drink from the baby cups you can buy from shops.



### Is it harder to leave a breastfed baby at home than a bottle-fed baby?

Breastfed babies are not harder to leave at home than bottle-fed babies.

Every baby is different. You can make it easier to leave your baby at home by slowly spending more time apart. Try to leave your baby with the same carers.





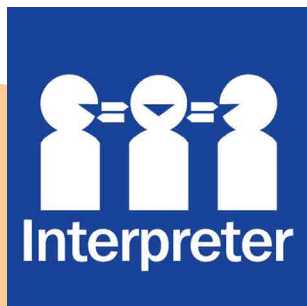


**National Breastfeeding Helpline is open 7 days a week. Call to speak to an ABA volunteer counsellor about breastfeeding.**

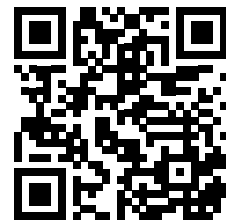
**If you don't speak English well, call Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450 and ask them to call the Breastfeeding Helpline on 1800 686 268.**

**More information:**

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 **131 450**



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