

# Lactation after infant death

Thousands of Australian women experience late miscarriage, still birth, neonatal or older infant death annually. Amidst their grief, some of these women need to manage the onset of lactation. Different women may want to manage lactation differently. For example, they may want to:

- suppress lactation
- sustain expressing
- donate breastmilk (where available)
- create memories using breastmilk.

## Resources

Sweeney, L., Carroll, K., Noble-Carr, D., Waldby, C. 2020. *Lactation after infant death: an analysis of Australian healthcare agencies' online health information*, Health Sociology Review, DOI: 10.1080/14461242.2019.1708206

Australian Breastfeeding Association 2020. *Lactation after loss*. Retrieved 17/1/20 from: <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/lactation-after-loss>



**Australian  
Breastfeeding  
Association**

For the most up to date version of this and other topics go to [abaprofessional.asn.au](http://abaprofessional.asn.au)



Here is some further information about each of these situations which you may find helpful to discuss with women depending on their wishes.

## i. Lactation suppression

Most women can suppress lactation by limiting the volume of milk removed, wearing a firm bra, using cold packs or cold cabbage leaves and using medication for pain and inflammation if required.

During the process of suppressing lactation, women may experience:

### Milk leakage

To help with this, women can:

- use breast pads
- stop the flow by pressing firmly on their nipple with their hand or forearm for several seconds.

### Engorgement

If the tips above do not sufficiently ease a woman's discomfort, it may help to express fully, just once, with a breast pump to relieve the pressure.

### Blocked ducts and mastitis

- Apply warmth to the breast for up to a few minutes before expressing.
- Express every few hours to keep the breast as empty as possible.
- While expressing, massage the breast gently.
- Between expressing sessions, use cold packs or cold cabbage leaves to reduce swelling and relieve pain.
- Consider use of anti-inflammatory medication or antibiotics when warranted.

## ii. Sustained expressing

Some mothers may appreciate the time expressing gives them to connect with and grieve for their baby. Mothers may want to continue to express their milk for days, weeks or even months.

## iii. Donation of breastmilk

While this option is not available to all women, some women have found that the ability to help other babies has assisted with their grieving.

## iv. Memory-making using breastmilk

Some women undertake various memory-making activities that involve their breastmilk. For example defrosting it and pouring it on a special plant in the garden, using it to make breastmilk jewellery, burying some milk with the baby or using breastmilk as a symbol in the funeral service.