



Australian  
Breastfeeding  
Association

For Health  
Professionals

# Storing and using expressed breastmilk

While the ideal way for an infant to receive breastmilk is at the breast, there are times when expressing can support a mother to continue breastfeeding or providing breastmilk to her infant.

Situations can arise when mothers need to express breastmilk. Expressing can be useful:

- when the baby is premature and cannot breastfeed yet
- to relieve engorgement, blocked ducts or mastitis
- when the mother returns to work or study
- as part of a strategy to help increase breastmilk supply
- if a mother has been advised by her healthcare provider to express colostrum antenatally
- to collect breastmilk for feeding the baby if the mother is absent.

## Methods of expressing

A mother can express by hand or with a manual or electric (personal or multiple-user hospital-grade) breast pump. The choice of method depends on the reason for expressing. For example, if a mother is expressing to collect colostrum during late pregnancy or in the early days after birth, then hand expressing may work well. If she is expressing all feeds for her premature baby, then a multiple-user hospital-grade electric pump would be ideal. If she is only expressing to collect milk for an occasional absence, then a manual breast pump may suffice.

## Storage of expressed breastmilk (EBM)

If it is not used immediately, freshly expressed breastmilk can be stored:

- at room temperature (26°C or lower) – for 6 to 8 hours
- in the fridge (4°C or lower) – for 3 days in the coldest part
- in a freezer compartment (-15°C or lower) inside the fridge – for 2 weeks
- in the freezer section of a fridge with separate door (-18°C or lower) – for 3 months
- in a deep freeze (-20°C or lower) – for 6 to 12 months.

EBM can be stored in various food-grade, BPA-free containers such as:

- small glass or plastic containers with spill-proof lids
- baby bottles with sealed lids (not teats)
- breastmilk storage bags
- a plastic syringe with a cap (for colostrum or small quantities)
- milk storage trays or ice cube trays (covered or sealed well).



**Australian  
Breastfeeding  
Association**

**For Health  
Professionals**

### Resources and services for families

*Breastfeeding: expressing and storing breastmilk* booklet

*Breastfeeding: using a supply line* booklet

*Expressing – Getting the milk to flow* webpage

*Expressing for your newborn* webpage

*Expressing – How often and for how long?* webpage

#### Breast pump hire

A call to the **Breastfeeding Helpline** on 1800 686 268 can provide reassurance, support and practical tips on the safe storage and use of expressed breastmilk.

#### Further reading

Brodribb, W. (Ed.). (2019). Expressing and storing breastmilk. In *Breastfeeding Management in Australia* (5th ed., pp. 387–398). Australian Breastfeeding Association.

**The practice and experience of expressing breastmilk** – ABA Professional feature article.

**Breastfeeding supplementer** – ABA Professional fact sheet.

### Thawing and warming EBM

- EBM can be thawed in the fridge or by moving the container in warm water.
- Once thawed in the fridge, EBM can be stored for 24 hours in the fridge or for up to 4 hours at room temperature (up to 26°C).
- If thawed outside the fridge in warm water, EBM may be returned to the fridge for up to 4 hours.
- Thawed EBM must not be refrozen.
- EBM can be heated only once. Any unused EBM which may have made contact with the infant's saliva must be discarded.
- Microwaves must not be used to warm EBM, as uneven heating can cause burns in the infant's mouth.

### Delivery of EBM

Depending on the individual situation, EBM can be fed to the infant via:

- a small cup or spoon
- a bottle
- a plastic syringe
- a supply line (also known as a breastfeeding supplementer) that delivers EBM to the infant through a fine tube taped to the mother's nipple (or her finger if finger-feeding).