

Exclusive Pumping

For many different reasons, **some mothers are unable to feed their babies directly from their breasts.** Even if your baby does not “breast” feed, your milk is still the best nutrition for your baby. All mothers do not respond equally to a breast pump and some mothers find it a challenge to maintain a full milk supply while exclusively pumping. Fortunately, there are quality breast pumps that can help you provide your milk for your baby.

When pumping for your baby, **feed your baby your most recently pumped milk whenever possible.** It is fine to use frozen milk when you need to, but your freshest milk provides the best nourishment and protection for your baby.

If you are exclusively pumping, the following suggestions may help you establish and maintain a full milk supply:

Getting Started

If you know that you will be pumping from the time that your baby is born, begin expressing your colostrum as soon as possible – preferably within the first hour after your baby is born.

On the first day, you may find that **hand expressing your colostrum** is easier and more effective than using a breast pump. (See the link below for a video demonstration of hand expression.) Hand express your colostrum frequently (every 1 – 3 hours) the first day and night. On the second day, or when your milk production starts to increase you can switch to a high-quality electric breast pump. Pump both breasts at the same time. Research has shown that this may result in a higher milk supply (and it might save you time).

Pump at least 8 – 10 times in 24 hours until you are certain that you have more than enough milk for your baby. If your baby is premature, it is important to have a goal of pumping at least 30oz a day before you decrease pumping frequency, even though that is a lot more than a premature baby is eating. If your baby is at least 37 weeks gestation at birth it is reasonable to just pump for their current needs. In the early months, you will need to pump at night, and most mothers find they cannot go longer than 4 hours between pumping sessions. After pumping both sides for ~10 minutes, use “hands-on pumping” and/or hand expression to remove any milk that was not removed while pumping. [How to use your hands when you pump.](#)

Once your milk supply begins to increase from drops to ounces, you may want to pump longer than 10 minutes. Avoid pumping for longer than 20 - 30 minutes at a time. If you need more milk, pump more frequently, rather than longer. You may also want to make or purchase a hands-free pumping bra for convenience.

Instead of pumping every 2 – 3 hours by the clock, some women will decide how many times they want to pump in 24 hours and will track the number of times they pump. This allows a mom to set her own schedule and have some flexibility. However, this may mean that at times you will need to pump every hour to make sure you pump a certain number of times in 24 hours. The number of times you pump is more important than the total time spent pumping, so even if you only have 5 minutes to pump, do it!



Reaching a Full Milk Supply

A full milk supply is around 30 ounces a day, depending upon your baby's needs. Once you meet this goal, you may be able to reduce the number of times per day that you pump and still maintain your supply. You can drop one pumping session every few days and keep an eye on your milk supply. Every woman is different. Some mothers can pump 5 times a day and maintain a full supply, while other mothers will need to pump 8 or 9 times a day. It all depends upon how much milk you can store in your breasts at one time.

Once you have a full milk supply (meaning that you pump enough milk that your baby is happy and gaining well), you may be able to pump less often during the night and not see a decrease in your milk supply. Be sure to pump to drain your breasts right before you go to bed and first thing in the morning. If you find that you become uncomfortably full, you may pump just a little in the middle of the night to “take the edge off” your fullness. If your supply should drop, simply increase the number of times you pump. You may also find that you are able to get enough milk even if you reduce the length of your pumping sessions. Some women find that 10 – 15 minutes is long enough.

What if Your Supply Starts to Decrease?

It is easier to increase your supply if you work to recover your supply right away.

- Pump more frequently. Increase to 8 – 12 pumping sessions per day. Some women do this by leaving their pump set up in a very visible location. Pump for even a few minutes every time you pass by your pump. Refrigerate or freeze your milk and clean your pump parts every 4 hours.
- Pump longer. Once the first “let down” subsides, push the button to set your pump back to the faster “stimulation mode” to see if you can get a second let down. Then return to the slower “expression mode.”
- Use “hands-on pumping.”
- Double check the size of your breast shield/flange to make sure it is still the best fit for you. Avoid turning up the suction too high that can cause trauma to nipple tissue. (See [\(Shield/flange fit handout\)](#))
- Consider a visit with an IBCLC to assess your individual situation and discuss taking a galactagogue or check shield/flange fit. (See our information on [Galactagogues.](#))

Weaning from Your Pump

When you are ready to stop pumping, you will find that gradual weaning is more comfortable.

- Drop a pumping session every 2 or 3 days.
- Pump for shorter periods of time.
- If you usually pump until you have a certain amount of milk collected, gradually decrease how much milk you pump each time. The key here is gradual. If you decrease too quickly, you may be uncomfortable or develop a plugged duct. (See our information on [Plugged Ducts and Mastitis.](#))
- If you find that your breasts become uncomfortably full while weaning, you may pump just to relieve fullness. Avoid the temptation to “empty” your breasts, which will encourage them to make more.
- Congratulate yourself on your commitment to giving your baby your milk!

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