

## Safe storage of breast milk in the home

PLACE	MAXIMUM TIME
<i>Fresh breast milk</i>	
Room	6 hours
Fridge: 5 to 10°C	3 days
Fridge: 0 to 4°C	8 days
<i>(If temperature rises above 4°C after 3 days, use within 6 hours or throw away)</i>	
Freezer: -18°C or lower	6 months
<i>Previously frozen breast milk</i>	
Defrosted in fridge	12 hours
Defrosted outside fridge	Use immediately

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**BfN Supporterline 0844 412 4664**

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## Safe storage

The lower the temperature, the longer the storage:

- You can store your breast milk for up to 3 days in a fridge running below 10°C.
- Breast milk can be stored between 4 and 8 days in a fridge running between 0 and 4°C. If the fridge temperature goes above 4°C during this time, use your milk within 6 hours or throw away.
- If you can't use a fridge at 4°C, try using a cool bag or box with deep frozen ice packs (changed every 24 hours). Protect your milk from the ice packs or it may freeze. The bag can also be used to carry milk.
- If you wish to store your breast milk for longer than 8 days, freeze as soon as you can after expressing.

**REMEMBER:** The more often the fridge door is opened, the more likely the temperature will rise. Try to check the temperature of every fridge (or bag) used for storing your milk each time you use it. If the fridge has no built in thermometer, use a fridge thermometer from kitchenware stores.

## Using stored breast milk

- Ideally, defrost frozen breast milk in the fridge. If needed quickly, try defrosting under cool, then warm, running water. Dry the outside of the container with kitchen paper before use.
- Consider using stored breast milk straight from the fridge to avoid the risks of over-heating and scalds.
- Do not heat in a microwave.**
- Use defrosted breast milk immediately and throw away any unused milk.
- If the milk smells sour **DO NOT USE.**
- When stored, the cream and milk may separate out. This is normal. Shake gently to mix before use.
- Some babies are reluctant to take expressed breast milk, particularly at first. Try offering milk from a cup or spoon. They may be less reluctant when someone else gives it. If expressed milk is refused try not to worry - your baby will make up any missed feeds by breastfeeding more often or for longer on your return.

This leaflet is designed so you can tear off the tables on the last page to display on your fridge, keep with you, or hand to your baby's carer.

## References

Hands A. Safe storage of expressed breast milk in the home. MIDIRS Midwifery Digest, vol 13, no 3, Sep 2003, pp 378-385.

Morhbach N, Stock J. 2003, *The Breastfeeding Answer Book (3rd Ed)*, La Leche League International

This leaflet was compiled by Anabel Hands, Microbiologist and BfN Associate Member (former Breastfeeding Supporter).  
Drawing by Jenny Richardson, BfN Breastfeeding Supporter and Tutor.

The Breastfeeding Network is an independent voluntary organisation offering support and information to breastfeeding women and those involved in their care.

**BfN** The Breastfeeding Network

PO Box 11126 Paisley PA2 8YB

Supporterline 0844 412 4664

9.30 am to 9.30 pm every day.

Calls provided by BT will be charged at 5 pence per minute. A call set-up fee of 3 pence per call applies to calls from BT residential lines. Mobile and other providers' charges may vary.

[www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk)

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# The Breastfeeding Network

# Expressing and Storing Breast Milk

“ I was determined my baby would still have my breast milk when I returned to work but was terrified I wouldn't be able to express enough and struggled to stockpile small quantities. Once I started work I found I needn't have worried or banked as much milk, but was still confused how best to store it ”

DESIGNED BY mortonward 0131 555 3553

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# Expressing and Storing Breast Milk

Returning to work, planning a night out or attending a special occasion and you wish to continue providing your baby with valuable breast milk? This leaflet gives you tips on how to hand express and store your breast milk for times away from your baby.

## your breast milk

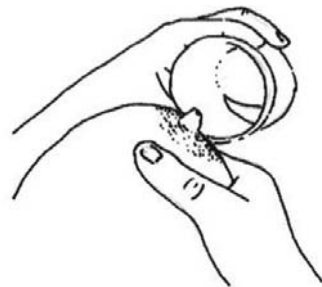
- Can be expressed by hand, by hand pump or by electric pump. Once you know how, hand expressing is easy and needs little equipment.
- Contains special ingredients that limit the growth of unwanted bacteria.
- Should still be handled and stored carefully to stop unwanted bacteria from getting into your milk and growing.
- Can be frozen, which affects some (but by no means all) of the special properties of breast milk.
- Stays at the highest quality when stored in a fridge, particularly when running at 4°C or below.

## Getting ready to express

- Remember to wash your hands.
- To collect your milk you will need a wide mouthed container, either sterile or well-cleaned and scalded with boiling water - a jug is ideal.
- Sit somewhere comfortable.
- To help your milk to flow (let-down) you might:
  - Relax with a warm drink, music or TV.
  - Have your baby close, or look at a photograph or toy to remind you of your baby.
  - Warm your breasts in a bath, shower or using warm flannels and practice expressing.
- Try some ways to gently massage your whole breast, working from the outside toward your nipple. Take care not to drag your skin:
  - Stroke with your fingertips.
  - Roll using your knuckles.
  - Try using circular movements.

## Hand expressing

Make a 'C' shape by placing your thumb above and your fingers below your breast near the edge of the areola (the dark skin) but away from your nipple.



- Gently press your thumb and fingers together, release your fingers and repeat in a rhythmic movement. Sometimes pressing inwards back towards your chest wall as you squeeze helps. You may need to experiment with how far back from your nipple to squeeze – everyone is slightly different.
- When the milk flow slows, re-position your fingers and thumb (as if moving them around a clock face), then express another area of your breast.
- Try to express all areas of your breast and alternate between breasts.

**REMEMBER:** When you first start to express it is common to get only a few drops of milk. As with breastfeeding, the more you practice, the easier it gets. Expressing at a different time of day may work better for you.

## The two UK breast pump hire companies are:

Egnell Ameda: Tel: 01823 336362  
Medela: Tel: 0161 776 0400

## Good hygiene

- **Always** wash your hands before expressing and handling breast milk and ask others giving expressed milk to do the same.
- **Always** use a sterile container with a lid, not the collection jug, to store your breast milk. You can buy disposable containers. Take care with plastic bags that can puncture easily.
- Try to use a different storage container each time you collect milk. If necessary, newly collected milk may be cooled and added to previously stored milk **on the same day only**.
- Label storage containers with **your name, breast milk, time** and **date** and put inside a clean sealed bag or box before storing.
- Store your breast milk in the fridge or freezer as soon as possible.
- Store away from meat products, eggs or any uncooked foods. Use the back of the fridge and not the door.

**IMPORTANT:** If you have any further questions on expressing or breastfeeding, do contact your midwife, health visitor or breastfeeding supporter for help and support.

If your baby has been ill or born prematurely please discuss this leaflet with your health professional to check whether the storage times apply.

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