

Breastfeeding FAQs: Pumping

Many breastfeeding moms pump their breast milk to give to their baby when they are away. Here's some information about pumps and when and how to pump safely.

What Type of Pump Do I Need?

That really depends on how often you plan to use your pump. Manual pumps tend to be best for occasional pumping, while electric pumps are better for regular or daily pumping.

- **Manual pumps.** Manual (or hand-operated) pumps are small and inexpensive (less than \$50) compared with electric pumps. They take more effort and more time than electric pumps to draw out milk, so they're better for occasional use. Many women keep a manual pump as a back-up in case there's a power outage or problem with their electric pump.
- **Electric pumps.** Electric (or automatic) pumps can be easier to use than manual pumps because they don't require as much physical effort and can draw out the milk faster. Many models let you pump both breasts at once, which is a real time-saver. This also may increase your milk supply. Electric pumps come in many sizes. Most can be plugged in or are battery-operated.

Most insurance plans will cover a breast pump. Call to find out if you can receive a free pump. If not, you can buy or rent a breast pump from lactation consultants, hospitals, retail stores, and online. If you don't have the money to buy or rent a pump, contact Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to find out about their free or low-cost pump program and see if you qualify.

Are Used Pumps OK?

It's not a good idea to borrow or buy someone else's used pump. This is because bacteria and viruses from the previous owner can get trapped inside the pump. They are potentially hazardous to your baby's health, even with repeated sterilization and cleaning.

Hospital-grade pumps, though, are meant for more than one user. These pumps let women use their own accessory kits, which lowers the risk of contamination.

Why Would I Need to Pump Right After Birth?

If your baby can't eat due to an early birth or illness, or if you are separated from each other, you can pump your milk. In the first 2 hours after birth, hand-express your breast and then begin pumping every 2–3 hours. Use a hospital-grade pump or an electric pump, if possible. You will make only small amounts of colostrum (a rich "pre-milk") until your milk fully comes in. Keep pumping and your supply will slowly increase.

If your baby is exclusively breastfeeding and gaining weight as expected, there's no need to pump right away. It can be tempting to build up a supply of milk for later. But this isn't a good idea because it can cause an over-supply of milk and keep your breasts engorged (over-full) for a longer period of time than expected.

When Can I Begin Pumping to Build Up a Milk Supply?

If you'll return to work after maternity leave or plan to spend time away from your baby, start pumping a couple of weeks before. This will give you time to practice with the pump and get comfortable using it. It also gives your baby time to learn how to drink from a bottle.

How much milk women can express with a pump varies. Don't be discouraged if it takes a few pumping sessions for you to express enough milk for a full bottle. Some women find that they express more milk when their baby is close by, if they look at a picture of the baby, or if they smell a piece of the baby's clothing. While it may take time to get the hang of pumping, it's a great way to ensure that your baby continues to get breast milk even when you're not there.

If you have questions or concerns about how much milk you are expressing, talk to a lactation consultant or your health care provider.

What Can Make Pumping Easier?

It can take a little practice and time for your body (and your mind) to get used to producing milk without your baby's help. These tips can make things easier:

- **Find a comfortable spot and relax.** Your let-down reflex (when milk is released) can be affected if you're frustrated, anxious, or rushed. So sit in a comfortable spot and try not to think about other things you need to do. Listening to soothing music can help. Find out what works best for you so that you can relax.
- **Massage your breast before and during pumping.** Using your hands to massage and compress the breast can help empty them more efficiently. This can be hard if pumping both breasts at once so consider wearing a hands-free bra.
- **Hold something that reminds you of your baby,** like a picture or video on your phone, or has your baby's scent, like a blanket or piece of clothing. This can help you get in the right frame of mind and trigger let-down.
- **Place the breast shield (flange) correctly over your breast.** The breast shield is the plastic cup that goes over the nipple and areola (the dark circle of skin around your nipple) when you pump. Make sure it's covering your entire nipple and areola (not just the top of your nipple) and get a good seal. If this doesn't happen, you may be uncomfortable and less likely to get the milk you need.
- **Find the right size breast shield for your breast.** While pumping, your nipple should move freely inside the tunnel of the breast shield without too much of your areola being drawn in. If this is happening or pumping is uncomfortable, try a different flange size. Most pumps come with different flange sizes, so find the best fit.
- **Adjust the speed and suction to the level that's comfortable for you when using an electric pump.** This will help prevent any discomfort. It's best to use the lowest setting that allows milk to flow comfortably.

Where Can I Pump at Work?

If you're pumping at work, find a discreet place where you feel comfortable.

Many companies offer their employees pumping and nursing areas. If yours doesn't, ask your supervisor or the human resources department about an office or other private area that might be suitable. Employers are required by law to provide an appropriate area (that's not a bathroom) for employees to pump breast milk and reasonable time to do so.

How Do I Clean Pump Parts?

Before their first use, wash and then sterilize breast pump supplies (for example, the breast shields and any other part that touches your breasts or your milk) by boiling them for 5 to 10 minutes. Check the manufacturer's directions about how long to boil the parts.

You also can sterilize the parts with a countertop or microwaveable sterilizer, but boiling works just as well and costs nothing. After that, wash the bottles, nipples, and pump supplies in hot, soapy water (or run them through the dishwasher) after every use. They can spread bacteria if not cleaned properly.

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