

Your Breastmilk Makes a Difference

Expressing for Your Premature or Ill Baby

Your breastmilk is unique for your baby. It provides the best nutrition and contains protective factors that help prevent infections and support growth and development — especially important for premature and ill babies.

*Small amounts. Big protection.
Every drop counts.* 



When to start

- ✓ Start expressing as soon as possible after birth, ideally within a couple of hours, even if you only see a few drops of colostrum.
- ✓ Early and frequent milk removal helps your body build a good milk supply.
- ✓ Ask your nurse, midwife or lactation consultant for help to get started.

 *It's never too early to start.* 



How often

- ✓ Aim to express 8–10 times in 24 hours, including at least once during the night, especially in the first few weeks.
- ✓ Try not to go longer than 4–5 hours between expressions.
- ✓ As your milk supply increases, you may be able to adjust the number of times you express.
- ✓ Even small amounts of milk are valuable. Every drop helps protect your baby.

Frequent milk removal helps build and maintain your supply. 



How to express

- ✓ Use a hospital-grade, double electric pump if possible (expressing both breasts at the same time saves time and can help increase supply).
- ✓ Ensure the flange (funnel) size fits well and is comfortable.
- ✓ You can also hand express — ask a nurse or lactation consultant to show you the technique.
- ✓ Stay close to your baby when expressing, or have a photo or piece of their clothing nearby.
- ✓ Relax, take a few deep breaths and think about your baby.
- ✓ A gentle breast massage before and during expressing can help milk flow.



What to expect

- ✓ At first you may only see drops of colostrum — this is normal and very valuable.
- ✓ Your milk volume should increase over the first few days.
- ✓ It can take time to build a full supply, especially if your baby was born early. Keep going — your milk supply is responding to frequent removal.
- ✓ Some days may be harder than others. A missed session now and then is okay — just get back to your usual routine.



Storing your milk

- ✓ Use clean, labeled containers provided by the hospital.
- ✓ Follow the unit's guidelines for storing and transporting your milk.
- ✓ Clearly label with your name, date and time.
- ✓ Keep milk refrigerated or frozen as advised by your healthcare team.
- ✓ Ask about safe storage times for your neonatal unit.



You are not alone

- ✓ Your healthcare team is here to support you with expressing, storage and any challenges.
- ✓ Ask for help if you notice a drop in your milk supply — it usually returns with support and more frequent milk removal.
- ✓ Be involved in your baby's care (e.g. diaper changes, comforting, reading or gentle containment).
- ✓ Take care of yourself — rest, drink fluids, eat well and accept help from family and friends.

Learn more about breastfeeding, bonding and family support in **A Gift for You and Me!**

[Michelledrew.ca/babygift](https://michelledrew.ca/babygift)



A Gift for You and Me!

Michelle LeDrew, RN, MN

References:

1. World Health Organization and UNICEF. Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding: the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative for small, sick and preterm newborns. 2020.
2. UNICEF UK. You and your baby: Supporting love and nurture on the neonatal unit. <https://www.unicef.org.uk>
3. Human Milk Banking Association of North America. Guidelines for the safe handling, storage and preparation of human milk. (Follow your hospital's protocol).