

From triggering a let-down to operating a pump and safely storing your milk, expressing breastmilk can be tricky at times. SIMONE CASEY simplifies the process for you

Express YOURSELF



Pictures Getty Images, reader's own

Holding your baby close as you nourish him with a breastfeed, gazing into his eyes and breathing in his scent, is a beautiful thing. But sometimes feeding bub straight from the breast isn't possible. Perhaps you need to take a break because your nipples are sore, or because your baby is having trouble with latching on or sucking. Maybe you're returning to the workforce, or it could be you're going out for the night or on a trip away without your little. In these situations, the next best thing to offering the breast is to express your milk and let bub take it from a bottle or a cup.

Granted, hooking your boobs up to a plastic pump isn't the most romantic experience, but it needn't be difficult, either! Here's what you need to know.

GETTING STARTED

There are different ways to express your milk: either with hand expressing or using a manual or electric breast pump.

If you'd like to hand express, it can take a bit of practise. Sit down with a towel on your lap and a wide bowl to catch the milk. Hold your thumb and pointer finger in a 'C' shape around your nipple, press back into the tissue of the breast and roll your thumb and first two fingers together in a squeezing motion. Do this over and over rhythmically until the milk starts to flow. Some mums are able to express off a whole feed in this way.

If you decide to go with a pump, which one to choose depends on why you are pumping. If it's for occasional use – to build a stash for the freezer just in case, or if you just want to relax in the hairdressing salon for a bit of 'me time' – a trigger-action hand pump or a single electric pump may suit your needs. If you are expressing more often, say for a premature baby or because you're at work every day, you may be better off investing in a more robust, double pump designed for frequent use, or hiring a hospital-grade one from your local chemist or through the Australian Breastfeeding Association's (ABA) website www.breastfeeding.asn.au.

When it comes to cleaning your pump, it's simpler than you think. "Human breastmilk has wonderful anti-infective properties

which mean you don't need to sterilise your pumps," says the ABA's Meredith Laverty. "It's important, though, to rinse your breast pump in cold water in between uses and place it back in a storage container." Be sure to pull it apart once a day to wash in warm soapy water, rinse in hot water and air-dry.

PUMP UP THE VOLUME

Expressing mums usually aim to get every drop out of their breasts they can, but it's not always as easy as whacking the pump on and getting to it. "Don't be disappointed if it takes a little while to get large volumes while expressing," says Meredith. "Like feeding your baby, expressing will improve with practise."

If you're stressed or uncomfortable, you may have trouble triggering the let-down, or milk ejection reflex, which is a hormonal pathway between your breasts and your brain. "One of the best ways to encourage the let-down reflex is to think of your baby," says Meredith. Mum-of-one Rachel Clay did just that when she was expressing for her nine-month-old son to attend daycare. "I used to flip through photos of Patrick on my iPhone, I had hundreds of them," she says. "I noticed that by looking at him, it helped me heaps."

"Some mothers also find if they try to do their favourite relaxation techniques, such as breathing exercises, being in a quiet place or applying some warmth to the breast, it will help the milk to flow," Meredith adds.

Mum-of-three Lauren Zarb found short bursts of expressing worked better than longer sessions when she was expressing for her premature twin daughters, Zoe and Eva. "I found it better to pump for five to 10 minutes, put the bottles down, go off and do something and then come back and do it again. Pumping one side and feeding a bub on the other also worked."

EXPRESSING AT WORK

According to an Australian Institute of Family Studies report, 11 per cent of mums return to paid work when bub is three months old and over 20 per cent are back within six months of giving birth.

If you're planning a return to full-time work and wanting to maintain breastfeeding, >

you have the option of providing expressed breastmilk or leaving formula with your child's carer and beginning comp feeding – combining both breast and formula feeds. (Some blessed women have a third option: visits with their little during the day for feeds!).

If you'll be expressing your milk, there'll be some planning involved. "It's great if you're able to start storing a little milk in advance of returning to work," Meredith says. "We know babies need about 800 to 1000ml over a 24-hour period regardless of age," she explains. To calculate how much milk to leave, divide this number by the number of feeds your baby usually has in 24 hours and work out how many feeds he will miss.

Another detail to sort out before you return to work is where you'll be able to express. Legally, employers have to allow breastfeeding mums to take lactation breaks during work time, though it varies from state to state whether these breaks are paid or unpaid. Your employer also has to provide a private space for you to express in that's not a toilet or shower.

As well as a place to express, you'll need to think about where to put your milk. If there isn't a fridge available, "an insulated bag with a refreezable ice-brick is relatively inexpensive and makes a great container for the breast pump and bottles of milk," says Meredith.

For more information on streamlining the process, find out if your employer is accredited with the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace (BFW) program (www.breastfeedingfriendly.com.au), as many Australian workplaces are now aiming to become more family-friendly by supporting working mothers. While you're online, Meredith also suggests getting a copy of the ABA brochure *A Caregiver's Guide to the Breastfed Baby* (www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/caregivers.html) for your child's carer, to help with issues such as pacing feeds and safely heating your milk while you're at work. ★

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that babies be exclusively breastfed until around six months of age, with breastfeeding to continue alongside appropriate first foods until at least 12 months of age. While breastfeeding is the ideal way to nourish your baby, we recognise that not all mums are able to do so. If you have any concerns about your breastfed or bottle-fed baby, make an appointment with your child health nurse or GP.

"I exclusively expressed"

Helen Wilson breastfed her first two children and when baby number three, Katelyn, was born with a facial palsy and couldn't effectively suck at the breast, Helen was still determined to give her breastmilk like her brothers. After deciding to exclusively express for her daughter, Helen developed a "love-hate relationship" with her breast pump, which she would attach herself to eight times in every 24 hours.

"At first it was hard and new, but I had to do it," says Helen. "Loads of people I came across, including my partner, told me to switch to formula, but this made me more determined to continue what I believed in because I knew it was best for my baby."

Helen set herself a goal to express until Katelyn started solids. "After I got there it was easier, she was a good little eater." Helen ended up weaning Katelyn onto cows' milk when bub was just shy of one year, after discovering she was pregnant with her fourth child. "I don't regret expressing exclusively for Katelyn, but I really valued breastfeeding after doing it!"

When baby Hannah arrived, Helen was ecstatic to go back to breastfeeding again. "When I held Hannah in my arms for the first time and she began to find and suckle on my breast, I felt an intense bond and closeness, which was cut short with Katelyn," she says. "I felt very blessed and thankful."



Helen's top expressing tips

- ★ Invest in a good pump and an electric bottle warmer. Having both these items can take so much of the hassle out of expressing and heating up milk.
- ★ Cutting a hole in each cup of your bra is a great hands-free option. "I'd sit at the computer for a lot of my expressings and balance the bottles between my breast and the table," Helen says.
- ★ Check your pump for damaged parts at regular intervals. "I was caught out by this once. I discovered the problem when my volumes suddenly started decreasing."
- ★ Utilise your friends and partner when possible, and accept all offers of help in the early days.

STORING YOUR BREASTMILK

"The greatest thing about human breastmilk is that it can be kept at room temperature, up to 26°C, for up to eight hours," says the ABA's Meredith Laverty. See the chart below for more on breastmilk storage, including utilising your fridge and freezer.

TYPE OF BREASTMILK	KEPT AT ROOM TEMPERATURE	KEPT IN THE REFRIGERATOR	KEPT IN THE FREEZER
Freshly expressed	6-8 hours (26°C or lower)	3-5 days (4°C or lower)	3 months in freezer, 6-12 months in deep freeze (-18°C or lower)
Previously frozen – thawed in fridge but not warmed	4 hours or less – that is, the next feeding	24 hours	Do not refreeze
Thawed outside fridge in warm water	For completion of feeding	4 hours or until next feeding	Do not refreeze
Baby has begun feeding	Only for completion of feeding	Discard	Discard

* These guidelines are based on the National Health and Medical Research Council's *Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents Incorporating the Infant Feeding Guidelines for Health Workers, 2003*.