

# Breastfeeding: Pumping milk for your baby in the NICU

## How often do I need to pump?

Pump as often as your baby would normally breastfeed — about every 2 to 3 hours during the day. At night, you can do one 4 to 5 hour stretch, making sure to get a total of 8 pump sessions in a 24-hour period. Many mothers find that setting exact times for pumping and staying on that schedule makes pumping easier. But a strict schedule isn't necessary. Here's a sample schedule:

### Pumping schedule example

6am 9am 11am 2pm 5pm 8pm 10pm 3am

## How long do I need to pump?

Pump for 15 to 20 minutes on both breasts at the same time. If your pumping following a breastfeeding the time may be shorter. Once your milk is in, these times may change, work with your lactation consultant for a plan that works for you.

## How can I keep track?

Use a pumping record or breastfeeding app on your phone help you keep track of when you pumped and how much milk you produced.

## What do I need to do?

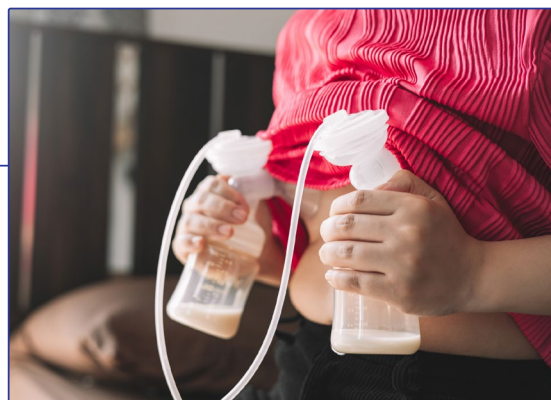
- 1 Buy or rent a pump. Your lactation consultant can talk with you about your options.
- 2 Set a pumping schedule. Try to pump 8 times in 24 hours and to completely empty your breasts.
- 3 Take care of yourself.
  - Follow an eating plan that includes generous amounts of essential nutrients from all food groups.
  - Drink when you feel thirsty.
  - Keep taking your prenatal vitamin.
  - Do your best to get enough rest.
- 4 Talk with your lactation consultant if you have any concerns.

## Which type of pump should I use?

**When you're visiting your baby in the NICU,** use one of the electric pumps reserved for visiting moms. At home, it is best to use a similar, hospital-grade pump. This type of pump has appropriate suction settings and can pump both breasts at the same time.

**Buy or rent a pump.** (If you already have an electric pump, ask the consultant if it's adequate.) When you get the pump and the pump kit, have your lactation consultant check the fit of your breasts to the **flanges** [FLANJ-ees]. (The flanges are the plastic funnels that come with the tubing in the pump kit.)

If you are worried about the cost of renting a pump, **some insurance companies will cover the rental cost.** If you're on Medicaid and signed up with WIC (Women, Infants, and Children — a government nutrition program), you can get a pump from your local WIC office.



## What can I expect as I begin?

When you first start pumping, you may not get much milk — perhaps only a few drops at a time. But stick to your pumping schedule. Your milk supply will gradually increase. The more you pump or breastfeed, the more milk you'll produce. Use a pumping log to write down when you pump and how much milk you pump each time.

### TIP: Think let-down, not suction

Effective pumping is more about the let-down (the body's release of milk) than it is about the sucking action of the pump. To help trigger let-down, try to:

- **Focus your thoughts and emotions on your baby.** Think of your baby, smell an item of their clothing, listen to a recording of their cooing or crying, or look at their picture.
- **Try to promote relaxation.** Try placing heating pads on shoulders, breathing exercises or whatever helps you relax.
- **Stimulate your breasts.** Gently massage your breasts for a few minutes before pumping.

## How do I clean the pump kit?

When you buy or rent a breast pump, you'll get a pump kit with it. The kit includes the collection bottles, the flanges, and the tubing that connects the flanges to the pump machine. Clean your kit according to these instructions:

- **After every pumping session, wash the flanges and bottles with hot soapy water.** (Don't get the tubing wet. You only need to wash the flanges and bottles, not the tubing.) Air drying your pump parts is best. If that is not possible, use a paper towel to dry.
- **Once a day, sanitize the flanges and bottles.** You can do this in several different ways:
  - In the dishwasher.
  - By boiling the parts for 20 minutes in a pot of water. If you have hard water, add 1 to 2 tablespoons of white vinegar to prevent mineral deposits from building up on the kit.
  - In a microsteam bag. You can buy this online or at a lactation supply store.

## How do I store my milk?

Store your milk in the plastic containers provided by the hospital. You can use these when you pump at the hospital and at home (take some containers home with you).

- **Always label the container.** Follow the labeling policy of your hospital.
- **Don't mix milk from different pumping sessions.** Never add freshly pumped milk to milk that is already in your refrigerator or freezer. Store milk from each pumping separately.
- **Refrigerate or freeze the milk immediately after pumping.** If your baby will take the milk within 2 days, refrigerate it. It is best to use frozen milk within 3 months, but can be used up to 12 months if kept in a deep freeze. These guidelines may vary according your baby's health.

## How do I transport the milk?

Follow these steps:

- **For refrigerated milk:** Keep the milk cool by packing it in a cooler with ice.
- **For frozen milk:** Put the frozen containers in a cooler, but do NOT pack the cooler with ice. (Believe it or not, ice will actually speed up the thawing of frozen milk.) Instead, fill the cooler's empty spaces with a towel or with insulated beads. **Note:** Once frozen milk thaws, it needs to be used within 48 hours.

### Breast milk safety

To make sure *your* milk is given only to *your* baby, containers of breast milk are carefully checked by hospital staff or by you. Checks involve verifying your baby's name and hospital number at each of these times:

- When your milk is brought onto the unit.
- As breast milk is being prepared to be fed to your baby (only give your baby milk that has been checked).
- Before you take your milk home.

Your participation in these checks helps prevent errors in handling and feeding of breast milk.