

For sick and preterm babies the importance of breastmilk cannot be overestimated, supporting growth and providing protection from infection. In particular, evidence suggests that the use of breastmilk decreases the incidence and severity of the life threatening disease necrotising enterocolitis. By providing her breastmilk a mother can be assured that she is uniquely contributing to the wellbeing and development of her baby. However, expressing breastmilk over a long period of time is extremely demanding and if a mother is to succeed she needs the support from those involved with caring for her and her baby.

The Baby Friendly Initiative recommends that a formal review is carried out at least once within the first 12 hours following delivery to support early expressing and **at least four times within the first two weeks** to ensure that mothers are expressing effectively and to address any issues or concerns they may have. Early (within the first 4-6 hours), frequent (at least eight times in 24 hours including once at night) and effective (combining hand and pump expression) expressing is crucial to ensuring a mother is able to maximise her milk production so that she can maintain her supply for as long as she wishes. With the correct support to express, a mother can aim to achieve an average milk volume of approximately 750–900ml in 24 hours at day 14.

Delays in starting to express or any reduction in the frequency or effectiveness of expression will compromise her long term supply. Early detection and correction of problems will help her maintain confidence in her ability to produce milk for her baby.

Tips to help mothers succeed

- Hand expression is a good technique for obtaining small volumes of colostrum.
- Breast massage and relaxation techniques help to get her milk flowing.
- Expressing close to her baby or at least having a photo or piece of baby's clothing will help milk production and flow.
- Encourage her to ask for regular skin to skin contact or, where this is not possible, to interact and undertake care giving for her baby as this boosts milk-producing hormones.
- When using a pump ensure she is taught the correct technique and always check the pump shield to ensure it is the correct one.
- Encourage double pumping as this saves time and may contribute to being able to express long term
- Help her make a plan for expressing and consider using an expressing log to help – she does not have to stick to a strict 3-4 hourly routine but help her to avoid long gaps (four-hourly in the day and six-hourly at night) between expressions.
- Emphasise the importance of the night-time expression as this is when hormone levels are highest and long term expressing most likely to succeed.
- Although it is expected that milk volumes increase daily in first two weeks, it is important that mothers don't feel pressurised to obtain a 'specific' amount. Refer for specialist support if you have concerns about milk volumes.
- Keep her updated on baby's progress and encourage her to be with her baby as much as possible as this will help alleviate anxiety.
- Value her contribution and let her know how important it is for her baby.

Expressing assessment form

If any responses in the right hand column are ticked refer to specialist practitioner. Any additional concerns should be followed up as needed. Please date and sign when you have completed the assessments.

<i>Mother's name:</i>	<i>Baby's name:</i>	<i>Date of assessment:</i>				<i>Birth weight:</i>				
	<i>Date of birth:</i>					<i>Gestation:</i>				
What to observe/ask about	Answer indicating effective expressing	✓	✓	✓	✓	Answer suggestive of a problem	✓	✓	✓	✓
Frequency of expression	At least 8 times in 24 hours including once during the night.					Fewer than 8 times. Leaving out the night expression.				
Timings of expressions	Timings work around her lifestyle with no gaps of longer than 4 hours (daytime) and 6 hours (night time)					Frequent long gaps between expressions. Difficulty 'fitting in' 8 expressions in 24 hours.				
Stimulating milk ejection	Uses breast massage, relaxation, skin contact and/or being close to baby. Photos or items of baby clothing to help stimulate oxytocin.					Difficulty eliciting a milk ejection reflex. Stressed and anxious.				
*Hand expression	*Confident with technique. Appropriate leaflet/DVD provided.					*Poor technique observed. Mother not confident.				
Using a breast pump	Access to electric pump. Effective technique including suction settings, correct breast shield fit. Switching breasts (or double pumping) to ensure good breast drainage. Uses massage and/or breast compression to increase flow.					Concern about technique. Suction setting too high/low, restricting expression length, breast shield too small/large.				
Breast condition	Mother reports breast fullness prior to expression which softens following expression. No red areas or nipple trauma.					Breasts hard and painful to touch. Evidence of friction or trauma to nipple.				
Milk flow	Good milk flow. Breasts feel soft after expression.					Milk flow delayed and slow. Breasts remain full after expression.				
Milk volumes	Gradual increases in 24 hr volume at each assessment.					Milk volumes slow to increase or are decreasing at each assessment.				

Hand expression may not need to be reviewed every time

Date	Information/support provided	Signature

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