

# Expressing Milk for your baby in the Neonatal Unit



**Healthier  
Scotland**  
Scottish  
Government

## Congratulations on the birth of your baby

Having a baby who is early or ill can be a very emotional time. As parents you may feel overwhelmed and unsure of what to expect or what your role is. This is all very normal.

The breastmilk you produce for your baby is unique. Research shows that the earlier you start and the more often you express, the more milk you will produce for your baby. This is really important especially in the first few weeks. This leaflet has information to help you express milk for your baby but your nurse or midwife can also show you how to hand express and use the breast pump.



Holding me in skin contact helps me to feel safe and also helps you make more milk for me

## The value of colostrum

If your baby is born prematurely or is sick, breastmilk is like “medicine” that only you can provide.

Colostrum is the early breastmilk that your body makes during the first few days after giving birth and helps protect your baby especially from infection.

Your milk contains a special mixture of fats that help my brain development



Colostrum is produced in very small quantities but every little drop is precious. It can be collected in a syringe and given to your baby as soon as possible after birth. This is normally given straight into your baby's mouth.

If your baby is born early you will produce colostrum for a longer time which offers more protection to your baby's immature body.

Your breastmilk is easier for your baby to digest and lowers the chance of a serious bowel condition called necrotising enterocolitis

Every drop of breastmilk your baby receives will give them the best possible start in life. You can decide at a later date if you wish to carry on to breastfeed or express in the longer term.

## Hand expressing

Expressing colostrum is easier by hand in early days after birth.

- Start expressing within 1 to 2 hours of giving birth.
- Even if your baby is not feeding, aim to express at least 8-10 times in 24 hours including once overnight.
- Times between expressing don't need to be regular; it's the number of times you express that can make the difference. Expressing once overnight can help increase your supply for the next 24 hours.
- The more often you express, the more milk you will make. If you are worried at any time, please ask your nurse or midwife for support.





## How to hand express



### Step 1

Start off by encouraging your milk to flow – being near your baby will help.

To express by hand, start by gently massaging your breast and nipple to stimulate the hormones needed to release milk.

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### Step 2

Position your thumb and fingers in a 'C' shape 2 to 3 cm back from the base of the nipple.

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### Step 3

Gently press and release, press and release, and keep repeating until your milk starts to flow. This may take a few minutes.

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### Step 4

When the flow slows down, move your fingers round to a different part of your breast and start again. Change breasts and start again.

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You may find combining hand expressing and using the breast pump helps you to have more milk for your baby.

## Using a breast pump

There are many different types of breast pump so please ask your nurse or midwife to show you how to use the one on your unit.

When using the breast pump it can be helpful to express both breasts at the same time (double pumping). This helps to save time and can also stimulate your hormones which can increase your milk supply. You can use a modified bra to help hold the funnels in place.

It is important that the breast funnels (the part of the collection kit that fits over your breast) fit well. This is so that expressing is comfortable and can also to help with your milk supply.

Staff will ask regularly how you are getting on over the first few weeks. If you experience any discomfort when hand or pump expressing, ask your nurse or midwife for support.

Even if I'm not able to feed I enjoy the taste of your small amounts of your milk in my mouth



- Some days may be harder than others. On these days do what you can to relax and look after yourself.
- Spending time in skin contact/kangaroo care (see below) with your baby will help you both relax and it can also help increase the hormones that make and deliver milk.
- Expressing next to your baby's bed where you can see and touch your baby, can increase the hormones that make and release more milk.
- When you can't be close to your baby, think about how you felt during skin to skin. Having something that smells of your baby can help too.
- Getting up in the middle of the night to express can be difficult. However, for your milk supply it's really important to express overnight. Try having a drink of water before you go to bed and when you get up in the night to go to the toilet, you can take the opportunity to express at the same time.
- Cluster expressing (expressing two or three times within a few hours) can increase the number of expressions you can fit in to the day. You can do this at any time of the day, but can often be helpful before going to bed.
- Try not to leave long gaps at any time of the day as this may affect your supply in the long term

If you are worried about the amount you are expressing at any time, speak to your nurse or midwife. You could also look at the checklist at the back of this booklet.



## Kangaroo care (skin to skin contact)

As soon as your baby is stable, staff will support you to have kangaroo care with your baby. It helps regulate baby's heart rate and breathing, keeps them warm and helps calm you both. Whilst in skin contact your baby will sleep more deeply which helps them grow and nurture their growing brain. It can help to comfort your baby after blood tests or a medical procedure.

Kangaroo care also helps you produce hormones which can help with your milk supply. As your baby grows they may start to show feeding cues (e.g. putting their hands to their mouth, making sucking noise, licking their lips). This is a great time to start practicing breastfeeding.





## WEEK 1

You may find it helpful to record the number of times you are expressing and the amount you express. You can use the chart below to do this.

Remember, in the early days, you will only make small amounts of colostrum but every drop is important to your baby. In the next few days you should see a gradual increase in the amount of milk you make.

In the early days it is really important that you express your breasts as much as you can to help you make as much milk as possible. If you are concerned please speak to your nurse or midwife.

Exp number	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
1	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
2	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
3	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
4	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
5	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
6	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
7	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
8	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
9	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
10	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
Daily total	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls

WEEK 2

You have been expressing for a whole week - well done! Every drop makes a big difference for your baby.

Kangaroo care and massaging your breasts before you start expressing will help stimulate hormones that help you and your baby relax and also help you make more milk for your baby.

You may be feeling a rollercoaster of emotions at this stage. It can be normal to feel tearful and stressed. The nurses and midwives in the neonatal unit can help you deal with these emotions. Do not be worried about asking for help.

Exp number	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
1	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
2	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
3	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
4	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
5	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
6	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
7	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
8	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
9	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
10	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
Daily total	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls

### WEEK 3

You have now been expressing for 2 weeks - well done!

Being involved and doing as much of your baby’s care as you can will help you feel close to your baby. You and your partner are the most important people in your baby’s life and spending as much time as possible with your baby will help them get to know you. Your baby will be comforted knowing you are close. Being close to your baby can also help with your milk supply by increasing the hormones that produce breastmilk.

Exp number	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
1	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
2	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
3	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
4	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
5	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
6	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
7	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
8	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
9	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
10	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
Daily total	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls

WEEK 4

You have now been expressing for 3 weeks - well done!

Having a baby on the neonatal unit can be very tiring, so try and be kind to yourself. Spending time resting in kangaroo care with your baby helps soothe and calm you both.

As your baby develops, they will begin to show feeding cues (for some babies this may not be yet). Caring for your baby for long spells in kangaroo care will help you pick up on these cues. When your baby is ready to move towards breastfeeding (if this is what you want to do) then staff will be able to support you with this.

It is important to continue to express frequently to maintain your supply so that you have lots of milk for your baby when they are ready to feed. Am I doing everything I can?



Exp number	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
1	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
2	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
3	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
4	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
5	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
6	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
7	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
8	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
9	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
10	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls
Daily total	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls	mls





When I hear your voice and feel your gentle touch it helps me feel loved  
When you hold me close I sleep better which helps me grow

Please put a tick in the box if you are happy or unhappy you would like more support:

			<b>Top Tip</b>
Are you expressing at least 8-10 times per day?			Expressing two or three times within a few hours can help you to express more each day.
Are you expressing at least once during the night?			Expressing at night increases the hormones that make milk and can be really helpful in maintaining or increasing your supply.
Are you double pumping?			Expressing both breasts at the same time can help supply and save you time.
Are you massaging your breasts before using the pump?			Massage releases oxytocin and helps your milk to flow.
Is the pump working well? i.e. The suction seems less than before.			Ask staff to check if you are not sure.
Are you having any pain or discomfort when expressing?			If you are having pain or discomfort, please ask staff for support.
Are your breasts feeling sore, heavy or red?			Ask the staff to check your breasts.
Are you having kangaroo care/cuddles/positive touch with your baby?			Ask staff to help you to have more skin contact and cuddles.
Are you able to express by your baby's cot?			Ask staff if you need help with this.
Is the amount of milk you are expressing increasing?			This is a good sign but check with staff if you are worried.
Is the amount of milk you are expressing decreasing?			This happens to lots of mum's so please ask staff for support and advice to increase your milk supply.
Are you happy with storing and transporting your breast milk?			Ask the staff for advice.

Help and information is also available on <http://www.parentclub.scot> or you can call the National Breastfeeding helpline on **0300 100 0212** available every day of the year for support.

## NOTES

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