

Expression of breast milk

All mothers should learn how to express their milk. This is useful if mother is separated from her infant; if the infant is too weak to suckle; if the breasts are severely engorged. Expression can be done by hand or with a pump (hand or electrical); however, in emergencies it is very unlikely that pumps or electricity will be available so this section will concentrate on hand expression.

Hand expression

1. Ensure you have privacy
2. Wash your hands thoroughly.
3. Prepare a very clean cup or container with a wide neck to collect the milk in.
4. Relax, get comfortable and think of your infant, if your infant is not there it may be useful to have something(s) of your infant's, e.g. a photograph or a piece of clothing to smell.
5. Stimulate your breast to release milk (this is called the let-down reflex) by gently massaging and stroking your breasts from the outside in towards the nipple.
6. Lean slightly forward so that the milk can be collected in the container.
7. Hold your breast by placing your fingers underneath and thumb on top. Your index finger and thumb should be about 4cm (an inch and a half) away from the base of the nipple; this may or may not correspond to the outer edge or her areola depending on its size. This should position the thumb and forefinger over the lactiferous sinuses, which are the areas in the breast where the milk collects.
8. Press your thumb and forefinger in slightly towards the chest wall. Compress the breast tissue (lactiferous sinuses) between your fingers using a rolling motion, and then release. Do not allow the fingers to slide along the tissue. Press and release, stimulating as much as possible the rhythm of your infant's suckling. This should not hurt; if it does hurt you are doing it wrong and needs to improve your technique. Don't hurt yourself by squeezing, rubbing, pushing or pulling too vigorously.
9. Be patient, practice relaxation techniques.
10. Move your hands around your breast so that you expresses from all areas of the breast.
11. Express one breast for at least 3-5 minutes until the flow slows; then express the other side, then repeat both sides. You can use either hand for either breast or both hands.

