

# Hand Expression

Hand expression is an important skill to learn when breastfeeding or pumping.

## Reasons to Hand Express

- A drop of colostrum/breastmilk can be applied to your nipples to keep them moist and lessen the risk of infection.
- An expressed drop of colostrum/breastmilk on your nipple can soften and encourage your baby to latch and feed.
- Expressing breastmilk can relieve breast discomfort and help soften your breast.
- Colostrum is thick and it can be more easily removed by hand expression than by pumping.
- Expressing colostrum/breastmilk can help establish and build your milk supply.
- Expressed colostrum/breastmilk can be fed to your baby.

## Tips to Help Your Milk Flow

- Find a comfortable place to express.
- Use different actions that you know will help you relax (i.e. music, meditation, massage, etc.).
- Relax and think about your baby.
- Look at your baby or a picture/video of your baby.
- Try a warm shower or place a warm cloth on your breasts before you begin.
- Gently massaging the breasts.
- Learn where to place your fingers on the breast. Try different positions until you find what works best for you.
- Drops of milk may not appear right away. Continue practicing and ask for help if needed.

## The Collection Container

- Talk to your health care provider about the best type of collection container to use and how to clean the collection container.
- If you are expressing colostrum expect to collect a few drops to a teaspoon at first. A small collection container such as a spoon or syringe is fine to use.
- If you are expressing breastmilk you will need a larger collection container. Choose one with a wide opening. Be sure it is clean before you begin.

**Hand expression is a learned skill. You will get better by practicing.**

## How to Hand Express



- Wash your hands with warm water and soap before expressing your colostrum/breastmilk.



- Gently massage each breast before hand expressing.
- Stroke down towards the nipple.



- Place your thumb near the darker skin (areola) and cup the rest of your hand under your breast.
- Press your hand back towards your chest, while at the same time gently squeezing your thumb and first finger together. This should not hurt. Remember: Press, Compress, Release.



Press  
(back towards your chest)



Compress



Relax

*Adapted with permission from Health Nexus*



- Express your milk until no more comes out. Then rotate your fingers to another place outside the darker area (areola) and repeat.
- Switch from breast to breast until the milk flow stops completely. The amount of colostrum/breastmilk that you express can vary every time you express.

If you have concerns about hand expression or the amount of colostrum/breastmilk that you are getting, please contact your health care provider or someone skilled in helping with breastfeeding right way.

**Videos on Colostrum Collection:**

Global Health Media – Expressing the First Milk:  
<https://globalhealthmedia.org/videos/expressing-the-first-milk/>

HealthLink BC – Hand Expressing Milk:  
<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/pregnancy-parenting/parenting-babies-0-12-months/breastfeeding/video-hand-expressing-breastmilk>

More Milk Sooner – How to Hand Express:  
[https://youtu.be/3fePtAUueko?si=jnXYnoj\\_wRxi4Klb](https://youtu.be/3fePtAUueko?si=jnXYnoj_wRxi4Klb)

**Videos on Breastmilk Collection:**

HealthLink BC – Hand Expressing Milk:  
<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/pregnancy-parenting/parenting-babies-0-12-months/breastfeeding/video-hand-expressing-breastmilk>

Global Health Media – How to Express Breastmilk:  
<https://globalhealthmedia.org/portfolio-items/how-to-express-breastmilk/>

Stanford Medicine – Hand Expression of Breastmilk:  
<https://med.stanford.edu/newborns/professional-education/breastfeeding/hand-expressing-milk.html>

Adapted from South LA Health Projects WIC Program/LA Bio Med with permission 2012. Currently revised by the Breastfeeding Coalition of Southwestern Ontario (BSCO) with representation from London Health Sciences Centre, Middlesex-London Health Unit, Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital, Southwestern Public Health, Chatham-Kent Health Alliance, and Woodstock General Hospital. Most recently revised March 2024.