

# How to Use an Electric Breast Pump

*Patient Information*  
www.interiorhealth.ca

## When is an electric breast pump needed?

In the first few days after your baby is born, you will have small amounts of colostrum (the early milk) that is the perfect food for your baby. During this time, if breast expression is needed, it is often better to use hand expression.

Later, when your milk increases on about day 2–3, pumping with an electric breast pump may be recommended:

- If your baby is unable to breastfeed (ill or in the special care nursery)
- If you are separated from your baby for other reasons
- If you are having breastfeeding difficulties (e.g. low milk supply)

## How do I pump my breasts?

“Hands on” pumping is recommended. This means using your hands and the electric pump together.



By combining breast massage, hand expression, and pumping you can double the amount of milk you get than if you just used the electric pump.

Refer to the IH Handout “Hand Expression of Breast Milk” or your copy of “Baby’s Best Chance” to learn more about massage and hand expression (see “For More Information” on back page.)

**Video:** We recommend you watch “Maximizing Milk Production with Hands-On Pumping.”  
<http://newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/MaxProduction.html>

## Getting started

- Wash your hands well before you begin.

## Pumping Instructions

- Massage your breasts gently.
- Set the pump pressure to the highest setting that is comfortable for you.
- Pump (either single or double)
- When using a double-pumping system, pump both breasts at the same time for about 10 minutes or until your milk flow stops.
- When using a single-pumping system, pump each breast twice for 5 minutes each time for a total of 20 minutes (5 minutes on left; 5 minutes on right and repeat) or until your milk flow stops.

- While pumping, use your hands to compress (see below) and massage your breasts.
- Massage again. Take a several minute break to massage your breasts. Pay special attention to the outside parts of your breast.
- Hand express each breast. Feel for heavier areas in your breasts and massage/express those areas. Switch back and forth letting the milk drop into the pump flange.
- Finish expressing in a way that works for you. Either hand express or pump each breast. Most mothers find it takes about 25 minutes to do all these steps.

Develop your own method. You will discover what helps you get the most milk out.

## Breast compression

Do breast compression while you are either single or double pumping.

- Grasp a big handful of breast. It is like hand expression but you will have more breast in your hand and your fingers won’t be near the nipple.
- Bring your thumb and fingers together, compressing the breast.
- This should be done firmly, but not so hard it hurts or causes the tissue to be bruised.

*continued on other side* →

## Healthlink BC

Dial 8-1-1

Talk to a Nurse 24 hours/day, 7 days/week  
Pharmacist available between 5 p.m. - 9 a.m. daily  
Dietitian between 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. - Monday to Friday  
[www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca)



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- Using compression while pumping helps get more milk out of your breast.
- If you are double pumping, some mothers use a special bra or make one of their own to hold the pump sets in place “hands free.”

Refer to IH Handout “Breast Compression” (#823028) for more information.

## Tips to improve results

- If you know you will need to express your breast milk, start to express by hand as soon after birth as possible. Try to do this in the first 1–6 hours. The sooner, the better.
- Double pumping helps save time and makes more milk.
- Pump your breasts about 8–10 times in 24 hours. At least one time should be during the night in the early days. The longest stretch should be less than 6 hours.
- When your breasts are full, a message is sent to your brain to slow down milk production so it is NOT helpful to delay pumping till your breasts “fill up.”

## Help your milk ‘let down’

- Pump in a quiet place and try to relax. A relaxation tape may be helpful.
- The sight and smell of your baby helps, so have baby or baby items nearby (picture, clothing).
- Spend time cuddling baby skin to skin before pumping.
- Warmth can help – apply warm compresses or take a bath or shower before pumping.

- Drink enough fluids, eat well, rest and limit visitors.

## Get the right fit

- Make sure you have the size of pump flange that fits you best. Your nipples should not be rubbing against the tunnel. This can cause nipple pain and damage and you may get less milk.

PHOTO A: GOOD FIT



PHOTO B: TIGHT FIT



Photo credit: www.ameda.com

- If your nipples are bigger than a nickel or smaller than a pencil eraser at rest, then you likely need a bigger/smaller flange size than the standard.

## Collecting and storing expressed breast milk

Follow guidelines in “Baby’s Best Chance”.

- All breast milk should be expressed into a clean or sterile container.

- Expressed breast milk can be kept up to:
  - Four hours at room temperature.
  - Three days in fridge.
  - Six months in a separate door fridge freezer.
  - Six to twelve months in deep freeze.
- Expression of colostrum and early milk may be “layered” in the same container, after chilling first.
- Whenever possible give fresh breast milk to baby first before using any stored milk, as it provides more immunity.

## Cleaning the breast pump parts

- The instructions that come on the pump kit package may say that the kit should be thrown out after a single use or after 24–72 hours. There is no need to do this as long as you follow the cleaning instructions in the IH Patient Information Handout “How to Clean Breast Pump Parts” (#828272).

**If your baby is in the nursery ask your nurse about special instructions.**

## For more information

- Maximizing Milk Production with Hands-On Pumping. Dr. Jane Morton, Stanford University.  
<http://newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/MaxProduction.html>
- Healthy Families BC [www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca](http://www.healthyfamiliesbc.ca)
- Baby’s Best Chance – Parent’s Handbook of Pregnancy and Baby Care [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca)
- IH Patient Information Handouts [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca)
  - Hand Expression of Breast Milk #828267
  - How to Clean Breast Pump Parts #828272
  - Breast Compression #823028