

Building a Milk Supply With a Pump



There are ways you can build and maintain your milk supply if you are apart from your baby. Begin pumping and/or hand expression of your breasts within 1-2 hours of birth – (or as soon as you are able). Early stimulation will increase the hormones needed to develop a good milk supply. It is normal to get little to no milk initially. With regular stimulation, the amount will increase. It is not unusual for one breast to produce more milk. The following information is important for developing your milk supply:

Ensure the Correct Pump Set-Up and Fit

- Make sure the flange fits correctly. If the size is too small or large, you may feel sore and you will not get as much milk. Over time, some need to change flange sizes for a correct, comfortable fit. A Lactation Consultant can measure your nipples for the best fit, if you would like.
- Set the pump suction to the highest level that is **comfortable**. If it “pinches”, the suction may be too high. Too much suction causes trauma, pain, and decreases the amount of milk.

Develop a Pumping Schedule/ Routine

- Sit in a comfortable chair with back support and have something to drink nearby.
- Before and during your pumping sessions, use breast hands-on massage.
- Pump 8-12 times per day. Pump both breasts at the same time for 15 minutes.
- Pumping frequency should be no further than 4 hours apart or your milk supply may decrease. Manual hand expression and breast hands-on massage can result in a greater milk supply.
- Once your milk supply is established (typically after 14 days), you can vary your schedule to allow a longer sleep stretch at night. Try to maintain 8 pumping sessions per day.
- Tracking your pumping during these first weeks can be helpful for tracking supply. Paper pumping logs can be requested through Lactation or found in online applications.
- Brief, warm moist compressions or a warm shower before pumping can enhance your milk let-down. Warming your breast shields can also help.
- Use a picture or video of your baby, relaxation and/or guided imagery techniques during pumping. Cover the pump pieces with a blanket so as not to focus on the volume expressed.

Closeness to Your Baby is Important

- Make sure you spend time with your new baby. Do skin-to-skin contact (kangaroo care) as often as you are able. This has been shown to increase hormone levels to make milk.
- When possible, pump at your baby’s bedside. Studies show that you may make milk when you are able to pump close to your baby(ies).
- If you are not pumping at your baby’s bedside, some find looking a picture or thinking of your baby helpful. Others find distraction to be more helpful.

Take Care of Yourself

- Positive emotions help milk flow. Talk to your nurse or lactation consultant if you have concerns about how things are going.
- Make sure you get enough to eat and drink.
- Rest has been shown to increase milk supply. Try to nap in the day as you are able. Use strategies to support restful sleep at night despite pumping such as: adjusting your night sleep schedule, using a partner or family to help, placing a cooler at the bedside for milk, or using two sets of flanges so you don’t need to do washing at night.

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The first two weeks are the MOST important time for establishing a milk supply.

Sometimes health issues prevent being able to put baby to breast. In these cases, hand expression and a breast pump should be used.

HOW IT WORKS: After delivery of your baby and placenta, the hormones of pregnancy drop dramatically and the milk making hormones are given the chance to come in and take over. These two important hormones are called prolactin and oxytocin. Your body is most open to and efficient at using these in the first few weeks.

Prolactin is the hormone that **MAKES** milk.

It is very important to increase your prolactin levels soon as you can after delivery and in the first two weeks to maximize long-term milk supply.

Oxytocin is the hormone that **MOVES** milk.

It is the hormone responsible for the “let down” of milk. Without it, the milk will sit in the breast and eventually milk production will stop.

How do I increase my hormone levels?

- Skin to skin time with your baby
- Frequent hand expression
- Nipple stimulation
- Frequent pumping
- Hearing, seeing, and touching your baby
- Rest and taking care of yourself.

If you have any questions or would like help, ask your nurse or lactation consultant, or call the Breastfeeding Helpline at 608-417-6547, or 1-800-261-4449.