

Expressing Milk by Hand

Breastfeeding women have expressed (removed) milk by hand for generations. Hand expression may take a few sessions to learn. Once you know how, hand expressing gets easier.

When you remove milk from your breasts (either by breastfeeding or expressing), you are telling your body to make more milk. In the first few days after birth, you may express only a few drops. The amount will increase with practice and with time as your body produces more milk. Mothers who hand express in the first few days are shown to significantly increase their milk supply.

Why hand express?

- To soften your breasts if they are too full for your baby to latch on
- To relieve painful engorgement
- To maintain or increase milk production
- To collect milk if your baby is unable to breastfeed or if you are unavailable
- To remove milk when a breast pump is not available

How Do I Hand Express My Milk?

There are many ways to hand express, and with time, you will find what works best for you. The steps below are one suggested way to hand express your milk.

Supplies: To capture your milk and store for later use, use a clean feeding bottle, wide-mouthed jar, or bowl.

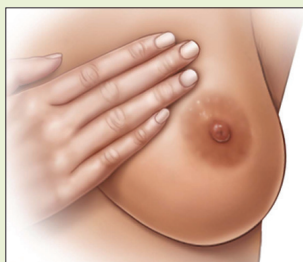


Figure 1

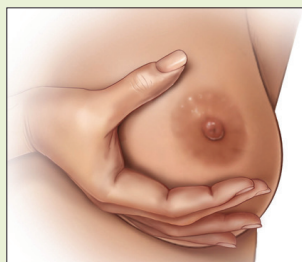


Figure 2

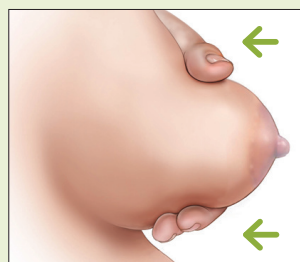


Figure 3



Figure 4

1. Use moist heat, such as a basin of warm water, a warm washcloth, or a shower, to promote milk release (letdown). Another way to help with letdown is to gently massage your breasts in circles and toward your areola (Figure 1).
2. Shape your hand in a "C." Place the thumb in the 12:00 position and the first two fingers in the 6:00 position about one to two inches behind the nipple (Figure 2).
3. Press your fingers and thumb back against the chest wall, trying not to stretch the skin around the nipple and areola (Figure 3).
4. Squeeze your breast gently by bringing your thumb and fingers together (Figure 4). Avoid pulling or sliding on the breast surface.
5. Compress your breast several times in this position.
6. Rhythmically repeat compressions, moving your thumb and fingers all the way around the breast, including areas near your chest and armpits.
7. Repeat procedure with the other breast.
8. Stop when the milk slows down.