

EXPRESSING AND COMMON PROBLEMS WHEN EXPRESSING

Expressing at home

Before leaving the hospital, arrange to rent an electric breast pump for use at home (please see the breast pump equipment hire information sheet).

Expressing guidelines?

- ❑ Continue expressing about 8 times in a 24 hour period. You can express in the middle of the night if you waken with full breasts or your milk supply drops in quantity. Try to express at the same time and place each day with a glass of water or juice and the telephone off the hook, sit in a comfortable, supportive chair with your arm resting on the chair arm and the pump on a table.
- ❑ Apply warm moist wash cloths to your breasts (if needed) and massage your breasts with small circular motions of the fingers all around, moving toward the nipple to help start the milk flowing. Check for any lumps of hard areas where the milk may not be draining well. If you find a hard area continue to massage it while you express. Many mothers massage their breasts in sections while they express to help drain all areas adequately.
- ❑ If you are going out and will miss a usual expressing session, take along a hand pump or hand express for your comfort.
- ❑ Place your milk into a sterilised, leak proof plastic container making sure it has been labelled properly. Place in the refrigerator (not on the door). Fresh breast milk should be brought into the hospital within 24 hours. If this is not possible then your breast milk should be frozen. Frozen breast milk will keep for up to 2 weeks in the freezer section of a fridge-freezer. Breast milk can be stored for 3-4 months at -20°C in a deep freezer.
- ❑ Always air-dry your nipples after expressing. Do not allow them to sit in a damp bra or wet nursing pads. Avoid using creams on the nipples.
- ❑ Transporting your milk to the hospital can be done each day when you visit. Put the milk in a cooler or thermos with ice to keep it cool. If you live far from the hospital or have no transportation, arrange with friends or relatives who live near you to transport the milk for you.
- ❑ Remember that the pump is not as good as an efficiently feeding baby. The quantity of milk you express will increase as you become more comfortable with the pump and your breasts are stimulated to increase their production.

Taking care of yourself

During this unsettled time, most of the focus is on the baby. You and your family and friends may be so preoccupied with the baby that you forget you also have needs. Your baby may need specialised equipment and professionals to help support his/her life but he/she also needs a healthy, well rested and nourished mother to provide his/her milk and mothering!

Nutrition – don't forget to eat! You need foods high in protein, calcium and iron. Sometimes it is difficult to think about preparing meals, especially if you visit your baby around dinner time or have other children to take care of. Many mothers rely on nutritious snack rather than large meals for their own food needs. Such snacks should include cheese cubes, yoghurt, peanut butter with crackers, nuts, fresh fruit, dried fruit (raisins, apricots) or cut up raw vegetables. Take these snacks with you when

you visit your baby. Ask friends and relatives to prepare casseroles to put in your freezer for quick warming when wanted.

Fluids – you will probably find that you are thirstier than usual while your body is making milk. Drink a glass of water, juice, milk or fat-reduced milk each time you express. You do not need to consume litres of fluid each day but around 1-2 litres is required for healthy milk supply. This is generally the amount that you will drink to your thirst. Limit your consumption of caffeine containing beverages (coffee, tea, soft drinks) to one or two servings per day.

Rest – find time each day to put your feet up and rest. If you have other children at home they can read stories with you or just use this as special cuddle time. Even if you do not sleep, resting will help you cope with all that is going on, if possible obtain help with the housework, laundry, cooking, errands and other children.

Common problems when expressing.

Sore nipples

Some mothers find their nipples become sore from expressing. Tips for helping sore nipples include:

- ☐ Massage your breasts first before expressing to promote milk flow
- ☐ Make sure the flange fits correctly. If it causes pain, try changing to a different brand.
- ☐ Use the lowest pressure that removes milk efficiently.
- ☐ Pump on the least sore side first or use hand expression until the nipple feels better
- ☐ Pump frequently for shorter periods
- ☐ Apply expressed breast milk to the nipples and allow them to air-dry
- ☐ Avoid using creams and lotions as they may delay healing

Fluctuation or decrease in milk supply

As some mothers continue to express milk, they might notice the supply decrease after several weeks or months of expressing, the following checklist will help you trouble shoot this situation should it arise.

- ☐ Are you eating a well balanced diet and drinking water and other fluids to thirst?
- ☐ Have you tried to diet or lose weight quickly? Decreases in nutrients can reduce the milk supply, increase your fatigue and interfere with your coping ability.
- ☐ Have you returned to work or increased your commitments outside the home? You may need to find time to rest and decrease tensions and demands on your time.
- ☐ Have you changed your pumping routine or decreased the number of times per day that you pump? You may need to express more times per day for shorter periods of time or change to a double set up where both breasts are pumped simultaneously. Or perhaps you could reintroduce an overnight expressing session? Try changing pumps.
- ☐ Have you been ill or under more stress? Once you are feeling better, the milk supply usually increases.
- ☐ Are you getting enough rest? Frequent trips to the hospital, caring for other children and trying to live a normal life can be taxing. Schedule rest periods during the day.
- ☐ Have you had a lot of company, houseguests or functions to attend? Skipped or shorter expressing sessions will lower the milk supply.
- ☐ Are you expressing during holiday season? Ask that celebrations and festivities be held in other relatives and friends homes.
- ☐ Has your baby's condition changed? It is very common to see a decrease in the milk supply when the condition of the baby worsens. A premature baby's course in the hospital is characterised by a series of ups and downs. When baby's condition improves, so will the milk supply. During these periods, the goal is simply to maintain some supply.

- ❑ A means of helping with a decreasing milk supply is the use of a medication called metoclopramide (maxalon) or domperidone. You will need to get a prescription from your GP for this medication.

Slow or erratic let-down of milk (milk ejection reflex)

Many of the previous situations affect the milk ejection reflex.

- ❑ Encourage the milk to flow before pumping. Try moist, warm compresses to the breast, immersing the breasts in a bowl of warm water, a warm shower, breast massage, looking at a picture of your baby or just thinking of your baby nuzzled next to you.
- ❑ Use relaxation tapes.
- ❑ Express at the same time and place.
- ❑ Turn on soft music, have a glass of water or juice, read a good book.
- ❑ Talk on the phone to a supportive friend or another mother who has expressed for a premature baby while you are expressing.
- ❑ When you visit your baby, hold your baby first if possible, then try expressing. Some mothers find it helpful to express sitting next to their baby's bed.

Blocked ducts and mastitis

Occasionally mothers experience an area in the breast that becomes hard or lumpy. This can indicate a group of milk ducts are not draining well and are becoming blocked with milk. This area will be hard, tender, warm or reddened. Take care of this area right away by:

- ❑ Applying warm, moist compresses, taking a warm shower, or immersing your breasts in a basin of warm water.
- ❑ Apply breast massage to the entire breast, especially the affected area, with small circular motions to encourage the milk to let down.
- ❑ Massage while you are pumping.
- ❑ Express more frequently.

If this condition goes uncorrected for too long it can lead to a breast infection (mastitis). This is characterised by a fever and a feeling that you are coming down with the flu. Antibiotics are frequently prescribed for this and you are still recommended to keep expressing.

Thrush

If you have been expressing without discomfort and then rapidly develop extremely sore nipples, burning or itching and possibly shooting pains deep in the breast you may have thrush in your breasts. If you suspect that you have developed thrush you will need to see your lactation consultant or GP.