

Expressing milk & using breast pumps

Mapu ū me te rokiroki waiū

Expressing milk or using a breast pump is usually unnecessary, as they are not part of normal breastfeeding.

Do not use a breast pump without good reason when you start breastfeeding/chestfeeding, especially in the first 6 to 8 weeks. This is because it may cause problems with your milk supply and feeding.

You might want to express milk to reassure yourself that you are making enough milk. As a pump will never remove as much milk as a feeding pēpi

(baby), this can make you unnecessarily anxious if you see less milk than you expected.

If you think you need a breast pump, make sure you talk with your midwife or lactation consultant before you make any decisions. You can usually see a lactation consultant for free if you are referred by your midwife or general practice team. You can also choose to pay to see a private lactation consultant.

Reasons to express milk

If you are breastfeeding/chestfeeding and need to be away from your pēpi, you can express breast milk. You may also need to use a breast pump if your pēpi will not or cannot feed at your breast.

To keep a good milk supply, it is essential that you regularly remove breast milk. So, if you want to keep your milk supply and your baby is not breastfeeding/chestfeeding, or only feeding a little bit, you need to express milk by hand or use a breast pump as often as your pēpi would normally feed.

If your pēpi is not breastfeeding/chestfeeding at all for some reason, you will need to express milk at least 8 times every 24 hours to keep your milk supply. This includes expressing throughout the night. If this happens to you, you should get help from a lactation consultant.

If you are trying to increase your milk supply, you can express after each feed. You may need to do this for a short or long time. This depends on whether your pēpi is feeding at your breast, and how much your supply needs to increase. You should get help from a lactation consultant.

Hand expression

For the first 2 to 3 days after birth, it is usually more effective to express by hand. Colostrum is too thick for breast pumps to remove effectively. Expressing by hand works can also work well if you need to remove milk between feeding. You can find useful information and tips about expressing milk by hand at *How to express breast milk* (go to www.kidshealth.org.nz and search for “express breastmilk”). This page includes a video on how to hand express.

Types of breast pump

For long-term, intensive use, a heavy-duty electric pump is ideal. These are closed-system pumps. This means that breast milk cannot travel into the motor parts of the pump. You may need to hire this type of pump, or you can buy some closed-system pumps.





Rental services clean hired pumps between users.

In some situations, Work and Income (WINZ) may help you buy a breast pump if it is clinically necessary. Ask your midwife, general practice team or lactation consultant for more information.

If you are using a pump for a shorter time, or less intensively, a smaller electric pump should be suitable. This might be if you need to express milk when you go back to work or you are trying to increase your milk supply, for example. A good hand (manual) pump should also work well.

If you only need the pump for a short time (for example, if you have painful or damaged nipples), a hand pump is usually enough. Hand expression can also work.

Renting or buying a breast pump

Open-system single-user pumps

There are many different breast pumps on the market. Unfortunately, many of the cheap ones do not work effectively. Ameda, Spectra, Unimom and Medela brands are reliable.

These pumps are available for sale at many outlets including pharmacies and some specialist baby care retailers. Or you can ask your midwife or lactation consultant for advice about local suppliers.

Closed-system heavy-duty pumps

These are available to rent or hire from some baby stores, pharmacies and lactation consultants.

There will be a weekly or monthly rental charge. You will also need to buy a personal kit with items such as breast shields, collection containers and tubing.

At most rental outlets, you will also have to pay a deposit, but you will get this back when you return the pump. At others you will have to give your credit card details when you hire the pump.

You can buy some closed-system pumps from pharmacies, baby item shops or lactation consultants.

Ask your midwife or lactation consultant for advice about local suppliers.

Breast shields – finding the right fit

When you are expressing with a pump, it is important to get a breast shield that fits properly. A shield that does not fit properly can create friction around your nipple. This can cause nipple damage and prevent you from getting milk out effectively.

To apply a breast shield, centre your nipple carefully in the opening. Then switch the pump on and increase the suction to a level that is comfortable for you. While you are pumping, your nipple should move freely in the shield tunnel. You should see rhythmic movements and milk flowing from your nipple.

Pumping should be comfortable and pain-free. If it is not comfortable, check these things.

- If your nipple is not moving and looks squashed in the shield tunnel, you might need a larger breast shield.
- If your nipple and a large amount of the area around it (areola) are being pulled into the shield tunnel during pumping, you might need a smaller shield.
- Turning the suction up high does not necessarily mean that you will get more milk out. The suction should be set at a level that gets you milk while being comfortable for you.

Different sizes of breast shield are available with the breast pump brands mentioned earlier. With some brands, you can even get a comfort shield or soft-fit shield.

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