

# **Breastfeeding:** Pumping Milk for Your Baby in the NICU

Congratulations on the birth of your baby and on your decision to breastfeed! Breast milk is the best food for all babies — and it's especially valuable for babies in the NICU.

# How often do I need to pump? For how long each time?

Pump as often as your baby would normally breastfeed — about every 2 to 3 hours during the day. At night, you can wait a little longer between sessions, so you can get more sleep.

A recommended schedule is to pump 7 times in the day and once in the middle of the night. Pump for 10 to 20 minutes on each breast (if you're using a double pump, this is faster). Here's what this looks like by the clock:

#### Pumping schedule example

3:00 a.m. 8:00 a.m. 10:00 a.m. 12:00 p.m. 3:00 p.m. 5:00 p.m. 7:00 p.m. 10:00 p.m.

Many mothers find that setting exact times for pumping and staying on that schedule makes pumping easier.

But a strict schedule isn't necessary. The important thing is to pump 8 times in 24 hours and to completely empty the breasts.

# How can I keep track?

For many women — especially those with babies in the NICU — the newborn period is a bit of a blur. To help you keep track of when you pumped and how much milk you produced, use the pumping record on the following pages.

This handout gives information on pumping and storing your milk. You'll need to pump if your baby isn't ready to nurse at your breast yet. Pumping frequently — and emptying the breasts each time — will help establish and maintain a full milk supply.



# Which type of pump should I use?

When you're visiting your baby in the NICU, use one of the electric pumps reserved for visiting moms. Your baby's nurse can show you to a pumping room. At home, it's best to use a similar, hospital-grade pump. This type of pump has appropriate suction settings and can pump both breasts at the same time.

Your lactation consultant can recommend a pump to buy or rent. If you already have an electric pump, ask the consultant whether it's adequate for the regular, daily use you'll give it.

When you get the pump and the pump kit, have your lactation consultant check the fit of your breasts to the flanges. (The flanges are the plastic funnels. They come in the pump kit with the tubing.)

If you're worried about the cost of renting a pump, consider:

- Some insurance companies will cover the rental cost. If you're on Medicaid and signed up with WIC (Women, Infants and Children, a government nutrition program), you can get a pump from your local WIC office.
- The cost of buying or renting a good pump is less than the cost of formula.

Talk to your lactation consultant if you have concerns.

#### TIP: Take care of yourself.

You can produce good milk for your baby even if you don't have a perfect diet or sleep pattern — but healthy habits like these do help:

- Sit down and eat at least 3 balanced meals and 2 healthy protein snacks every day. Have your partner or mother prepare food ahead of time for you. A plate of sliced apples, cheese, and a few crackers in the refrigerator is easy to take out and eat.
- Every day, drink 6 to 8 full glasses of water or at least enough so that you don't feel thirsty. Limit the caffeine.
- · Keep taking your prenatal vitamin.
- Sleep and rest well. Go to bed early and take naps during the day. (Unplug the phone!) Ask for help with daily tasks.

### What can I expect as I begin?

When you first start pumping, you may not get much milk — perhaps only a few drops at a time. But stick to your pumping schedule. Your milk supply will gradually increase. The more you pump or breastfeed, the more milk you'll produce. Use a pumping log to write down when you pump and how much milk you pump each time.

#### TIP: Think let-down, not suction.

Effective pumping is more about the let-down (the body's release of milk) than it is about the sucking action of the pump. To help trigger let-down, try these tips:

- Focus your thoughts and emotions on your baby.
   Think of your baby, smell an item of her clothing, listen to a recording of her cooing or crying, or look at her picture.
   Try to set aside stress and frustration. Relax and feel good about the healthy milk you're creating for your new baby.
- Stimulate your breasts. Take a warm shower before you pump, or place warm compresses on your breasts. Gently massage your breasts for a few minutes before pumping.

### How do I clean the pump kit?

When you buy or rent a breast pump, you'll get a pump kit with it. The kit includes the collection bottles, the flanges (the plastic funnels that fit over your breasts), and the tubing that connects the flanges to the pump machine. Clean your kit according to these instructions:

- After every pumping session, wash the flanges and bottles with hot soapy water. (Don't get the tubing wet — you only need to wash the flanges and bottles, not the tubing.)
- Once a day, sanitize the flanges and bottles. You can do this in several different ways:
  - In the dishwasher.
  - With the steam sanitizer in the NICU. Ask a hospital staff member where this is and how to use it.
  - By boiling the parts for twenty minutes. If you
    have hard water, add 1 to 2 tablespoons of white vinegar
    to the pot of water. This helps prevent mineral deposits
    from building up on the kit.
  - In a Medela Quick Clean Microsteam Bag. You can buy this online or at a lactation supply store.

### How do I store my milk?

Store your milk in the plastic containers provided by the hospital. You can use these when you pump at the hospital and at home (take some containers home with you). Follow these directions for milk storage:

- Always label the container. Use a printed hospital
   I.D. label with your baby's name and medical number on
   it. Write the date and time of the pumping on the label.
- Don't mix milk from different pumping sessions.
   Never add freshly pumped milk to milk that is already in your refrigerator or freezer. Milk from each pumping should be stored separately.
- Refrigerate or freeze the milk immediately after pumping. If your baby will take the milk within 2 days, refrigerate it. If not, put the milk in the back of your freezer, not in the door. Frozen milk can be kept for 3 months in a regular freezer and for 6 months in a deep freeze.

# How do I transport the milk?

As you bring pumped milk from your home to the hospital, follow these rules:

- For refrigerated milk. Keep the milk cool by packing it in a cooler with ice.
- For frozen milk. Put the frozen containers in a cooler, but do NOT pack the cooler with ice. (Believe it or not, ice will actually speed up the thawing of frozen milk.) Instead, fill the cooler's empty spaces with a towel or with styrofoam beads. *Note: once frozen milk thaws, you need to use it within a day.*

#### Breast milk safety

To make sure that your milk is given only to your baby, containers of breast milk are carefully checked. Checks are done by hospital staff or by you, and they involve verifying your baby's name and hospital number at each of these times:

- · When your milk is brought onto the unit
- · As breast milk is being prepared to be fed to your baby
- Before you take your milk home

Your participation in these checks helps prevent errors in handling and feeding of breast milk. Thank you!