

Information for breastfeeding families

Increasing breastmilk supply for a baby in the NICU



Frequent stimulation of the breasts, by breastfeeding or using a breast pump during the first few days and weeks, is essential to establish an abundant breastmilk supply.

Get off to a good start

Begin pumping or hand expression, as soon after the birth as possible, preferably in the first few hours. Pumping 8 or more times per day notifies your breasts that they need to produce more milk. The pump substitutes for the suckling your baby cannot currently do. Use a bi-lateral pump kit. This stimulates your milk supply better than pumping each breast individually.

We recommend that you use a hospital grade breast pump when you pump. It is the only type that is designed to start your milk supply when you are not breastfeeding yet.

Pump for about 15 minutes each time. When the milk stops flowing, it doesn't mean you are "empty". Do some hand massage to remove the remaining milk. Rotate your hands around the breast to empty all areas.

Pump regularly

Continue to pump 8 or more times per day. It does not need to be on a schedule. Some parents are able to get their 8+ sessions during their waking hours that they can take a 4-5 hour break in the middle of the night to sleep. If you miss a session, make up for it as soon as you can.

When you visit your baby, use the breast pumps in the NICU so you won't miss a session. Just bring your own kit with you.

Avoid these things that are known to reduce breastmilk supply

- Smoking
- Caffeine
- Birth control pills and injections
- Decongestants, antihistamines
- Severe weight loss diets
- Sage or peppermint (excessive amounts)

Make sure that your flange fits

You will know it fits if:

- Your nipple stretches easily in the flange
 - Only the nipple is pulled into the flange, none of the areola
 - Your breast "empties" all over with no lumps or full pockets of milk
 - There is gentle motion of your breast tissue outside the flange during each suction cycle
 - There is no pain, only a tugging sensation
- There is no compression ring or blanched skin around the areola.

Watch what happens during a pumping session. Your nipple size may change during a pumping session, or over the weeks that you use a breast pump. There are larger flanges sizes available if you find that yours is too tight.



Good Fit
Space seen around nipple.



Too Tight
Nipple rubbing along tunnel.

Pump like a baby feeds

At the beginning of your pumping session, start your pump on low suction and fast cycles. Your baby will start sucking fast and light. Gradually turn the suction up over the first few minutes. Once the milk begins to flow, that means your let-down reflex has started; this is the time that your baby would be sucking slow and deep. Turn your pump cycling down and continue increasing the suction until it begins to pinch. Then turn it back a bit. That will be the right suction level for you. Don't turn the suction beyond when it begins to feel uncomfortable. That can collapse your milk ducts and you will get less milk. There are some breast pumps that do these adjustments automatically.

Massage your breasts while pumping

Massage can make a tremendous difference in how much milk you obtain while pumping. For detailed instructions on how to do breast massage while pumping, view the video <http://newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/MaxProduction.html>. Massage until the milk stops flowing, then compress or gently squeeze the breast to remove even more. To have one hand free while pumping, you can use one hand to hold both flanges, wear a tight camisole or purchase a special bustier.



Stimulate your let-down reflex

Let-down is when the milk is flowing easily. Stress is a major problem for your let-down reflex and is common, of course, among NICU mothers. Here are some suggestions to help

- ✓ Hold your baby skin-to-skin
- ✓ Smell your baby or if you are home, smell your baby's worn clothes.
- ✓ Look at pictures of your baby
- ✓ Listen to the sounds your baby makes
- ✓ Listen to relaxing music or nature sounds
- ✓ Massage your breasts
- ✓ Relax your shoulders, do neck rolls
- ✓ Use visualization; think about rivers of breastmilk or think of a peaceful place
- ✓ Eat and drink something while pumping
- ✓ Pump prior to a stressful event
- ✓ Don't watch the collection bottles
- ✓ Get a back or foot massage
- ✓ Wear a Rice Sock around your neck or lay it over your breasts while pumping.



What is a Rice Sock?

Fill a clean gym sock with uncooked rice and tie it shut. Some people add pleasant smells such as lavender or chamomile to aid in relaxation. Heat it in the microwave for 30-60 seconds (make sure it does not get too hot) and wear it around your neck or lay over your breasts.



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