

Breastmilk expression guide for mothers of babies born with a cleft that extends into the palate (roof of baby's mouth)



- **Skin-to-skin contact** with your baby: this helps stimulate your milk supply and helps your baby develop their feeding and sucking skills.
- **Supplement feeding** times at the breast with expressed breastmilk from a specialized assisted feeding bottle (Haberman or Mam bottle) or a Dr. Brown specialist bottle with blue valve. Each feeding episode (breast, and bottle if needed) should be no longer than 40 minutes. Longer feeding times will have your baby tired and their weight gain may be slower as a result.
- **Frequency of breastmilk expression:** express at least 8 times in 24 hours in the early weeks until your milk supply is established, including at least once at night time between midnight and 6am.
- **Timing of expressions:** work around your lifestyle with no gaps of more than 4 hours (daytime) and 6 hours (night time) if you are exclusively pumping.
- **Stimulating milk ejection:** use breast massage, relaxation, skin-to-skin contact and/or being close to your baby (photos or items of your baby's clothing if you are separated from them). This helps to stimulate oxytocin and let-down of your milk.
- **Milk volumes:** a gradual increase in your 24 hours volumes should be seen (keeping a written record/log may help). Aim is to have 700mls-900mls in 24 hours for your baby by 2 weeks of age.
- **Breast condition:** breasts should feel soft after expressing and no red or tender lumps/areas identified.
- **Using a breast pump:** There are a range of pumps available. If you are exclusively pumping you need to choose a hospital grade pump and double pump. Your midwife/lactation consultant will advise on this. Pumps may be hired, or may be provided by your public health nurse (PHN) in some areas. Please contact your local Cuidiu or PHN for further information on availability.
- **Effective pumping technique:** you will need some education on cleaning and assembly of breast pump, storage of milk, hand pumping technique and breast massage/breast compression methods to increase flow. Your midwife, lactation consultant or Public Health Nurse can advise you on all of these topics.
- **Ensure breast comfort** with suction settings and flange size on pumps, as there should be no nipple soreness or damage. Your pump flange should be the correct size and fit for you. Most pumps come with a 24mm flange as standard however many women may need as small as a 13mm flange size. If a flange is too big the pumping may result in less efficient milk extraction however, if it's too small it can cause nipple friction & damage.

Adapted from the *Expressing Assessment tool* – CHI Crumlin 2016

References: UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative 2013, HSE Guidelines for mothers available at <https://www2.hse.ie/babies-children/breastfeeding/>

Resources:

- HSE resources on preparing for breastfeeding before the birth of your baby, available at <https://www2.hse.ie/pregnancy-birth/feeding-your-baby/preparing-for-breastfeeding-before-your-baby-is-born/>
- HSE breastfeeding booklet available at https://www.healthpromotion.ie/media/documents/HNP00367_Breastfeeding_A_Good_Start_2025_New_Web.pdf
- HSE breastfeeding and expressing booklet for premature babies available at https://www.healthpromotion.ie/media/documents/HNP00972_Premature_Breastfeeding_booklet_Web.pdf
- Hand expression video available at <https://med.stanford.edu/newborns/professional-education/breastfeeding/hand-expressing-milk.html>
- Maximizing your milk volumes video available at <https://med.stanford.edu/newborns/professional-education/breastfeeding/maximizing-milk-production.html> <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/resources/breast-compressions>
- Breast compressions: information from the Australian Breastfeeding Association available at <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/resources/breast-compressions>
- Feeding your baby with a cleft: www.intermountainhealthcare.org/ckr-ext/Dcmnt?ncid=522574921
- Medela breast pump hire information available on www.medicare.ie
- Ardo breast pump hire or purchase information available on www.breastisbest.ie
- Information on reduced hire breast pumps for mothers of babies who are premature or have a prolonged stay in a special care baby unit available on www.inha.ie

