

Breastfeeding FAQ's: Pumping

Whether you're a new mom or a seasoned parenting pro, breastfeeding often comes with its fair share of questions. Here are answers to some common inquiries that mothers — new and veteran — may have.

When can I start pumping my breast milk?



Some experts feel that if you start pumping and giving bottles too early — before your baby is used to breastfeeding — your little one might have *nipple confusion* and may decide that the bottle is the quicker, better option than the breast.

While some babies experience this confusion, others have no problem transitioning between a bottle and the breast.

Some lactation consultants recommend pumping right from the start as a way to stimulate and increase your milk production. This pumped milk can be given to the baby with a bottle, or through a nursing system in which the pumped milk goes through a small tube that attaches to the mother's nipple.

If you're returning to work after maternity leave, start a couple of weeks beforehand. If you wait until the day you go back to work, you may be frustrated to learn that it's not always easy to get your body to respond to the pump, which isn't nearly as cute and cuddly as your baby. In fact, it may take some practice and patience before you're able to produce enough milk without your baby's help. It also may take time for your baby to get used to taking a bottle.

Depending on how heavy their milk flow is, some women can fill a bottle in one pumping session, whereas others may need to pump two or three times (and sometimes more) to get a full bottle.

As frustrating as pumping may seem for some women at first, giving your baby a bottle of breast milk can allow you to get some much-needed rest and can let your partner, or other family members, participate in the bonding experience of feeding your baby. It also can allow you to continue to provide breast milk for your child when you return to work.

What type of pump is best?

Which kind of breast pump you opt to use is really up to you. Some women find manual (or hand-operated) pumps to be more portable, more discreet, and easier to use. And they're definitely cheaper than electric pumps (manuals are usually under \$50, whereas electric models can cost hundreds of dollars). But other nursing mothers may find that the effort required for manual pumps is too much.

Despite their expense, electric (or automatic) pumps can be easier to use than manual ones because they don't require you to exert much physical effort. And many models allow you to pump both breasts at once.

Options include double electric pumps, which pump each breast simultaneously, or the kind that alternate pumping action back and forth from one breast to the other.

Some women find that electric pumps are sometimes faster and, therefore, more efficient than manual, especially if you pump both breasts at the same time. But some find the noise of the electric pumps to be a little much (especially if you're pumping at work or away from home). And though they often come in easy-to-carry bags (such as backpacks or arm bags), the weight and bulk of many can be somewhat cumbersome.

You'll also want to keep in mind where you might be using the pump. Some electric pumps can be plugged in *or* battery-operated; others can't. So, unless you want to have to find a comfortable spot *and* an electrical outlet every time, you might consider finding one that offers both options. It's also important to consider a back-up method, such as a battery-operated or manual pump, in case of a power outage.

Whichever type of pump you use is up to you. You can look into which type of pump, if any, as well as how much of the cost, your insurance will cover.

If you don't have the money to buy a pump or don't receive one as a gift, contact Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to find out about their pump program and to see if you qualify.

Are used pumps OK?

Most doctors and pump manufacturers will tell you that it's *not* a good idea to borrow or buy someone else's used pump. Why? Because bacteria and viruses from the previous owner can get trapped inside the pump. These germs can be difficult to get rid of and can be potentially hazardous to your baby's health, even with thorough and repeated sterilization and cleaning. There are some

hospital-grade pumps which are meant for multiple users, each with their own accessory kit.

How can I make pumping easier?

As with nursing, it's important to be comfortable when pumping (which doesn't always seem possible while you're attached to a machine). It can be hard, especially at first, for your body (*and* your mind!) to become accustomed to producing milk without your baby's help.

Often, women's milk will "**let-down**" (or start to be released) when they see or hear their babies cry. So, when faced with an object instead of the welcoming face of your little one, you may find it hard to pump.

If you're having trouble with let-down, you may find it helpful to hold something that reminds you of your baby — a picture, a blanket, a favorite toy. Your let-down also can be affected if you're frustrated, embarrassed, or rushed. Try relaxing in a comfortable chair or couch and don't stress out too much about producing enough milk.

If your breast just doesn't seem to fit the pump correctly, the pump may come with different sized breast shields or you can buy a smaller or larger breast shield to place over your breast.

If you're pumping at work, try to find a discreet and comfortable place to do it. Many companies offer their employees pumping and nursing areas. If yours doesn't, ask fellow employees or the human resources department about an office or other private area that might be available.

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