

Reaching Full Milk Production with a Breast Pump

QUESTION: My baby was just born and can't breastfeed yet, what should I do to establish my milk supply?

ANSWER: Your body is ready to make milk, so start pumping with a multi-user, hospital-grade breast pump no later than 6 hours after your baby is born. Research has shown that moms who pump within one hour of birth have their milk come in sooner and are more likely to develop a greater supply of milk. Don't wait too long or it may be harder to reach your goal.


Begin pumping with your goal in mind:

By the time your baby is 2 weeks old, full milk production is 750-1050 mL each 24 hours (25-35 oz/day). Double pump, pump both sides at the same time, to save time and establish a better milk supply than pumping one side at a time.

QUESTION: How often should I pump to establish my milk supply?

ANSWER: Your goal is to pump 8-10x every 24 hours. This is how many times each day your baby would breastfeed. Try to pump about every 3 hours. If you want a slightly longer stretch of sleep, don't go longer than five hours between pumping.

You may find it helpful to keep a pumping log so you can keep track of the number of times you pump. The more you pump, the more milk you will make. The reverse is true too. The fewer pumpings per day, the less milk you make.



If your baby is unable to breastfeed after birth due to prematurity or other issues, pumping is the next best thing to establish your milk supply to help you reach your breastfeeding goals.

QUESTION: How long should I pump each session?

ANSWER:

Days 1-3: Pump at least 10-15 minutes each pumping session. Then tilt the flange back and hand express any remaining colostrum in your breasts into the flange and collection container. You may only get a few drops to a few mLs of colostrum with each pumping session these first few days. This is normal. Save this colostrum—every drop is precious for your baby.

After day 4: Once your milk is in, pump 15-30 minutes. Always pump 1-2 minutes after the last drop of milk to get those rich, high-fat drops of milk to help your baby grow. Remember to use your hands to help drain your breasts of milk—massage your breasts before and during pumping, gently compress your breasts during pumping and use hand expression after pumping.

QUESTION: Is double pumping, both breasts at the same time, better than single pumping?

ANSWER: Yes, double pumping is better than single pumping. Double pumping is less time consuming than pumping one breast at a time. Research has shown that most mothers who double pump the recommended number of times daily get their milk in sooner and develop a better supply overall.

QUESTION: Why do I have to make so much milk for my preterm baby?

ANSWER: Your baby may not be taking the same amount as a full term, healthy baby yet, but it is important to establish a full milk supply early on. Soon after birth, hormone changes happen that cause our breasts to make milk.

Each time you pump (or breastfeed), your body makes the hormone, prolactin. Prolactin helps your breasts make milk. Frequent pumping at regular time frames helps your body release prolactin. With each release, your breasts make more milk. If you don't pump enough times each 24 hours, this hormone gets too low and your milk supply will be low too.

QUESTION: My baby is 2 weeks old and I am making over 750mL of milk each 24 hours. Can I pump less often now?

ANSWER: If you are providing milk for one baby, then you may be able to pump less often and still make the same milk supply. Remember the goal is 750-1050mL (25-35 oz) each 24 hours.

- Try cutting back to 7x/24 hours for a few days. If your milk supply doesn't go down, you could try cutting back to as few as 5x each 24 hours. Make sure to keep a pumping log during this time to keep track of how much milk you are making each 24 hours.
- Pump for a shorter time. Watch your milk flow. You may notice that you are able to drain your breasts quicker now. Most mothers find 10-15 minutes is long enough.

References

Jones F. *Best Practice for Expressing, Storing and Handling Human Milk*. 3rd ed. Fort Worth, TX: HMBANA, Inc.; 2011.
Mohrbacher N. *Breastfeeding Answers Made Simple: A Guide for Helping Mothers*. Amarillo, TX: Hale Publishing, LP; 2010.
Spangler A. *Breastfeeding: A Parent's Guide*. 9th ed. Cincinnati, OH: Specialty Lithographing Co; 2010.



“Rather than pumping at set times, some moms find it simpler to focus on the total number of pumpings per day.”

QUESTION: How can I boost my milk production?

ANSWER: If your milk supply is low, work on boosting it sooner than later. Here are some ideas to try:

- Pump more often. Pumping 8-12 times each 24 hours for several days works for most mothers. Be patient. It will take a few days for your hormone levels to rise and your milk supply to rise.
- Pump longer. Pump until 2 minutes after the last drop of milk or 20-30 minutes, whichever comes first and hand express for a few minutes after pumping.
- Use hands-on pumping techniques. Gently massage your breasts before and during pumping. Gently compress your breasts during pumping.
- Check your breast flange fit. Flange fit can change with time.
- Pump next to your baby's bedside or after holding your baby skin-to-skin.
- Look into prescription and herbal medicines. Check with your lactation consultant and/or healthcare provider for more information.

This is general information and does not replace the advice of your healthcare provider. If you have a problem you cannot solve quickly, seek help right away.

Every baby is different, if in doubt, contact your physician or other healthcare provider.