

# Expression of Breastmilk Factsheet

## HOW TO EXPRESS BREASTMILK BY HAND

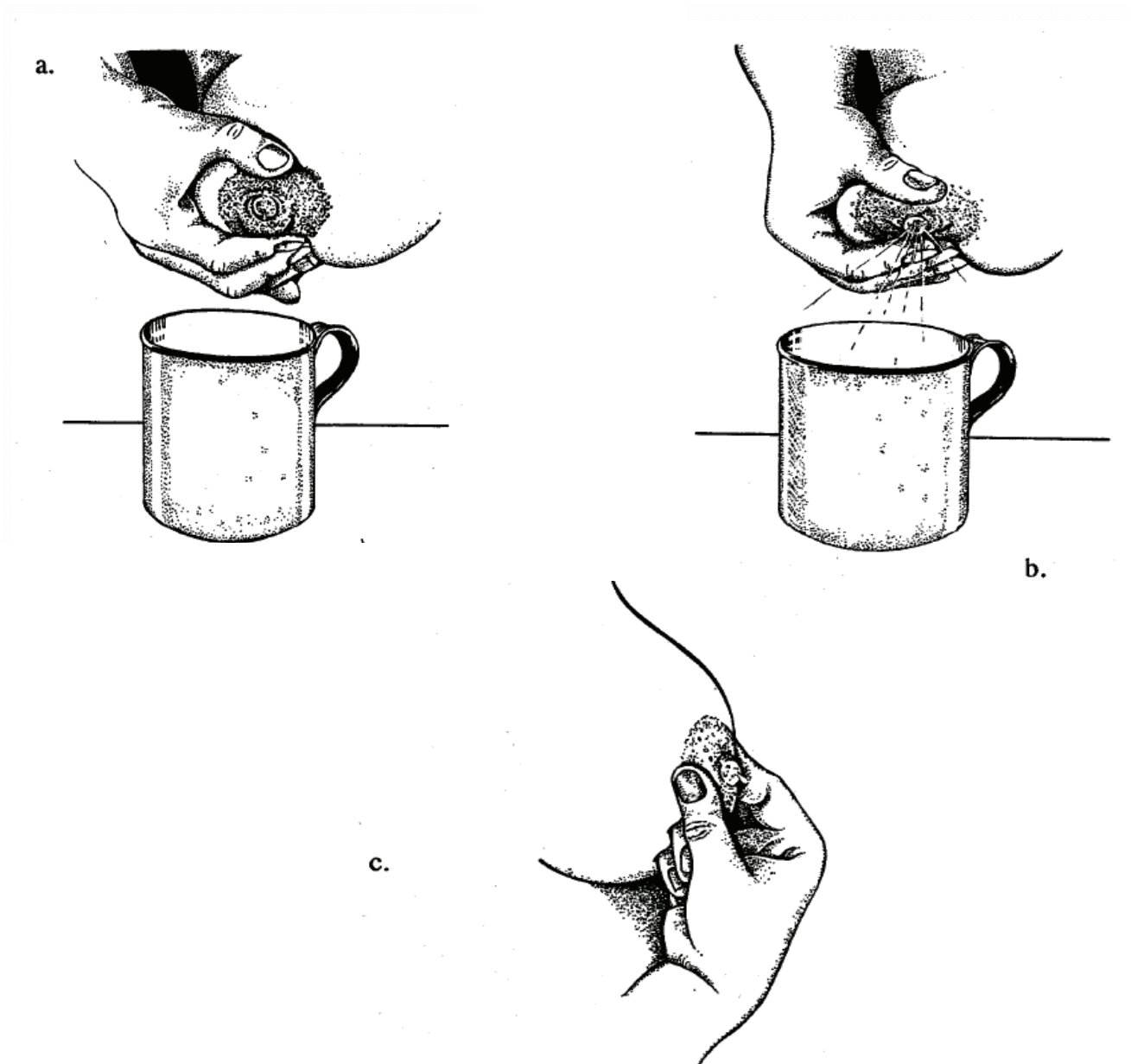
Teach a mother to do this herself. Do not express her milk for her. Touch her only to show her what to do, and be gentle. Teach her to:

- ◆ Wash her hands thoroughly.
- ◆ Sit or stand comfortably, and hold the container near her breast.
- ◆ Put her thumb on her breast ABOVE the nipple and areola, and her first finger on the breast.
- ◆ BELOW the nipple and areola, opposite the thumb. She supports the breast with her other fingers (see Fig.15.2).
- ◆ Press her thumb and first finger slightly inwards towards the chest wall. She should avoid pressing too far or she may block the milk ducts.
- ◆ Press her breast behind the nipple and areola between her finger and thumb. She should press on the larger ducts beneath the areola. Sometimes in a lactating breast it is possible to feel the ducts. They are like pods, or peanuts. If she can feel them, she can press on them.
- ◆ Press and release, press and release. This should not hurt - if it hurts, the technique is wrong. At first no milk may come, but after pressing a few times, milk starts to drip out. It may flow in streams if the oxytocin reflex is active.
- ◆ Press the areola in the same way from the SIDES, to make sure that milk is expressed from all segments of the breast.
- ◆ Avoid rubbing or sliding her fingers along the skin. The movement of the fingers should be more like rolling.
- ◆ Avoid squeezing the nipple itself. Pressing or pulling the nipple cannot express the milk. It is the same as the baby sucking only the nipple.
- ◆ Express one breast for at least 3-5 minutes until the flow slows; then express the other side; and then repeat both sides. She can use either hand for either breast, and change when they tire.
- ◆ Explain that to express breastmilk adequately takes 20-30 minutes, especially in the first few days when only a little milk may be produced. It is important not to try to express in a shorter time.
- ◆ Choose a cup, glass, jug or jar with a wide mouth to express breastmilk into. Wash the cup in detergent and water. Pour boiling water into the cup and leave it for a few minutes. When ready to express the breastmilk pour the water out of the cup.

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**Fig. 15.2 How to express breastmilk.**

- Place finger and thumb each side of the areola and press inwards towards the chest wall.
- Press behind the nipple and areola between your finger and thumb.
- Press from the sides to empty all segments.



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## Discuss how often to express milk:

*Ask: How often should a mother express her breastmilk?*

It depends on the reason for expressing the milk, but usually as often as the baby would breastfeed.

### **To establish lactation, to feed a low-birth-weight (LBW) or sick newborn:**

She should start to express milk on the first day, as soon as possible after birth. She may only express a few drops of colostrum at first, but it helps breastmilk production to begin, in the same way that a baby suckling soon after birth helps breastmilk production to begin.

She should express as much as she can as often as her baby would breastfeed. This should be at least every three hours, including during the night. If she expresses only a few times, or if there are long intervals between expressings, she may not be able to produce enough milk.

### **To keep up her milk supply to feed a sick baby:**

She should express at least every three hours.

### **To build up her milk supply, if it seems to be decreasing after a few weeks:**

Express very often for a few days (every 2 hours or even every hour), and at least every three hours during the night.

### **To leave milk for a baby while she is out at work:**

Express as much as possible

before she goes to work, to leave for her baby. It is also very important to express while at work to help keep up her supply.

### **To relieve symptoms, such as engorgement, or leaking at work:**

Express only as much as is necessary for comfort—if baby is soon to breastfeed. If engorgement or leaking has occurred because baby has not suckled or regular expressing has not occurred (and baby is not able to breastfeed), then express breastmilk until breasts are soft and comfortable.

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## Oxytocin—the “love” hormone

When a baby is in skin-to-skin contact with her/his mother after birth a very special hormone is secreted from the mother's pituitary gland called oxytocin.

Oxytocin has been described as the 'love hormone' and it is secreted when falling in love, and it makes mothers feel relaxed, contented and less anxious.

Mothers who breastfeed experience surges of oxytocin every time they breastfeed their babies. Skin-to-skin contact helps this hormone start, and keep working.

Oxytocin also makes the cells that are wrapped around the milk-making glands in breasts contract, which starts breastmilk flowing. A baby sucking at the breast triggers milk let-downs during breastfeeds and at the same time a mother's uterus contracts to help it get back into shape faster.

A respected anthropologist and researcher called Niles Newton wrote about the importance of the hormone oxytocin for humans as early as the 1970s. Newton explains that oxytocin pulses occur with orgasm (in women and men), with birth, and with breastfeeding and all of these events trigger bonding, love and caring behaviours.

Reference: MoH [www.breastfeeding.org.nz](http://www.breastfeeding.org.nz)

## How to Stimulate the Oxytocin Reflex

Stimulating the Oxytocin reflex can help the mother **psychologically to:**

- ◆ Build her confidence
- ◆ Try to reduce any sources of pain or anxiety
- ◆ Help her to have good thoughts and feelings about the baby.

It can help the mother **practically**. You can advise her to:

### **Sit quietly and privately or with a supportive friend.**

Some mothers can express easily in a group of other mothers who are also expressing for their babies.

### **Hold her baby with skin-to-skin contact if possible.**

She can hold her baby on her lap while she expresses. If this is not possible, she can look at the baby. If this is not possible, sometimes even looking at a photograph of her baby helps.

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## Warm her breasts.

For example, she can apply a warm compress, or warm water, or have a warm shower. Warn her that she should test the temperature to avoid burning herself.

## Stimulate her nipples.

To stimulate a let-down a mother can gently pull or roll her nipples with her fingers.

## Massage or stroke her breasts lightly.

Some women find that it helps if they stroke the breast gently with finger tips or with a comb. Some women find that it helps to gently roll their closed fist over the breast towards the nipple.

## Ask a helper to rub her back.

### Massage Techniques

Demonstrate how to rub a mother's back:



**Fig. 15.1 A helper rubbing a mother's back to stimulate the oxytocin reflex**

- ◆ Ask a participant to help you. She should sit at the table resting her head on her arms, as relaxed as possible.
- ◆ She remains clothed, but explain that with a mother it is important for her breasts and her back to be naked.
- ◆ Make sure that the chair is far enough away from the table for her breasts to hang free.
- ◆ Explain what you will do, and ask her permission to do it.
- ◆ Rub both sides of her spine with your thumbs, making small circular movements, from her neck to her shoulder blades (see box inset in Fig. 15.1).
- ◆ Ask her how she feels, and if it makes her feel relaxed. Ask participants to work in pairs and briefly practise the technique of rubbing a mother's back.

*Reference: Infant & Young Child Feeding Counselling: An Integrated Course Session 15 - Expressing Breastmilk.*