

Storage of Breastmilk Factsheet

STORAGE OF BREASTMILK

Ideally, milk fed directly from the breast is best. However, direct breastfeeding is not always possible, so expressed breastmilk that has been correctly stored is the next best option for infants.

Good Hygiene

Mothers should wash their hands before they express breastmilk. Once expressed, breastmilk can be stored in a plastic or glass container with an airtight sealed lid, for example, a food storage container. The container should be dated at the time of collection, and the caregiver should always ensure that the oldest milk is used first. Fresh or refrigerated milk retains beneficial properties and is preferable to breastmilk that has been frozen. The milk should be stored in small portions of around 100–200 mls to prevent waste.

Storage Containers

Expressed breastmilk that is being refrigerated or frozen should be stored in a new container rather than added to previously refrigerated or frozen breastmilk. Adding expressed breastmilk to frozen milk can cause the milk to thaw and then refreeze, which increases the risk of bacterial growth in the milk.

Containers and feeding equipment should be washed in hot soapy water and then rinsed. If the infant is three months old or younger, the containers and equipment also need to be sterilised. Sterilising equipment and tablets to make sterilising solution are available from supermarkets and pharmacies. The manufacturer's instructions must be followed carefully. Alternatively, the containers and feeding equipment can be boiled.

In the refrigerator, expressed breastmilk needs to be kept towards the back of the main body of the refrigerator where it is thought the temperature is the coolest. The New Zealand Food Safety Authority recommends refrigerators are operated at 0–4°C (NZFSA 2008).

Options for the short-term storage of expressed breastmilk include using an insulated cooler bag containing ice packs where refrigeration or freezing is not immediately available (CDC 2007; Jones and Tully 2006). The maximum storage time using this method is 24 hours. Little research has looked specifically at this form of storage. The recommendations include advice that the ice packs should be in contact with the milk containers at all times and there is limited opening of the cooler bag.

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How long can I store breastmilk?

Note that these guidelines are for expressed breastmilk that is fed to healthy, full-term infants who live at home.

Storage conditions	Storage time	Comments
Room temperature ($< 26^{\circ}\text{C}$)	4 hours	Cover containers and keep them as cool as possible (e.g., surround the closed container with a cool towel to help to keep the milk cooler)
Refrigerated	48 hours	Store milk in the back of the main body of the refrigerator
Frozen		Store milk toward the back of the freezer, where the temperature is most constant
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Freezer box in refrigerator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">2 weeks	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Separate door fridge/freezer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">3–6 months	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Separate deep freeze	<ul style="list-style-type: none">6–12 months	

MoH Guidelines - Storage of Breastmilk www.breastfeeding.org.nz

How do I use expressed breastmilk?

Frozen expressed breastmilk can be thawed in the refrigerator or by placing the container of milk in warm water until the milk has thawed.

Expressed breastmilk should not be thawed or heated using a microwave oven because microwaving destroys some of the milk's immunological components. There is also a risk of uneven heating and scalding.

Expressed breastmilk can be warmed by placing the cup or bottle containing the milk in hot water. Before feeding the infant, caregivers should swirl the container of milk to mix the fat portion back in and distribute the heat evenly. They should test the temperature of the milk by shaking a few drops on the inside of their wrist. It should feel comfortably warm to the touch before being given to the infant.

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Is expressing milk the same as breastfeeding?

Expressed breastmilk (EBM) provides very similar nutrient and immunological composition to breastmilk from the breast although as EBM is stored the composition does change.

The advantages of breastfeeding are that it provides milk that is always at the right temperature, readily available and microbiologically safe.

Breastmilk varies in composition over the lactation period and during a single feed to meet the child's individual and varying appetite and thirst, and hence nutrition and fluid requirements, so being breastfed allows the infant to self-regulate feeding.

Breastfeeding also encourages emotional attachment between the mother and infant.

Reference: MoH www.breastfeeding.org.nz