

Breastfeeding Management Factsheet

HOW TO EXPRESS BREASTMILK BY HAND

Hand expressing - discussed and demonstrated:

<http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/babies-and-toddlers/breastfeeding/expressing-breast-milk-and-storing-expressed-milk>

Overview of the technique:

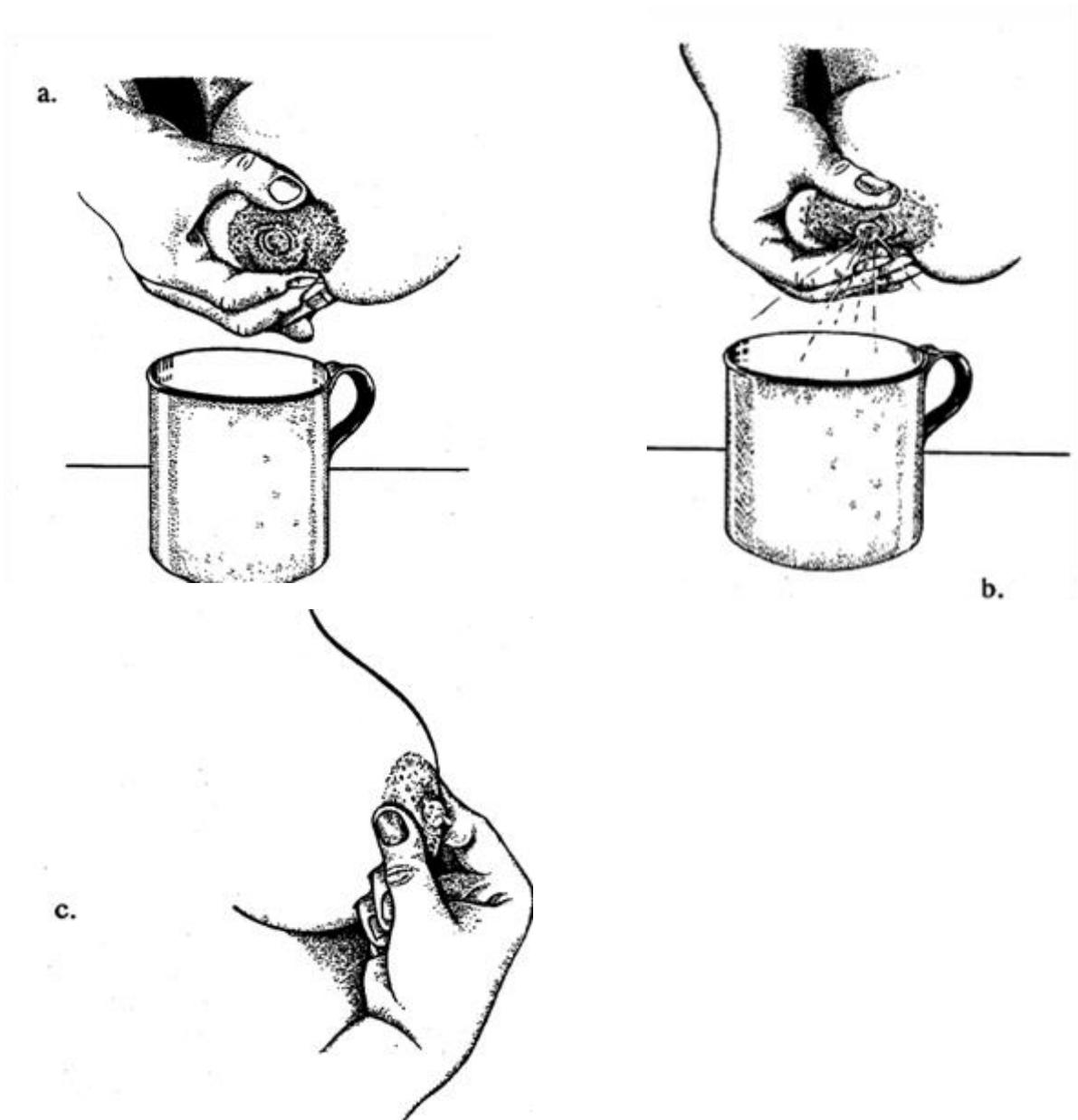
Teach a mother to do this herself. Do not express her milk for her. Touch her, only if requested, to show her what to do.

Teach her to:

- Wash her hands thoroughly.
- Encourage a let-down. This can be achieved by relaxing and include such things as - holding her baby, looking at her baby, breast massage, neck/back massage or an enjoyable snack to eat
- 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.1.1).
- Press her thumb and first finger slightly inwards towards the chest wall. She should avoid pressing too firmly as she may block the milk ducts.
- At this point bring her finger and thumb together. Sometimes in a lactating breast it is possible to feel the ducts.
- 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 and a milk supply has been established. In the first two or three days the amount of colostrum expressed may be limited – a teaspoon is a good amount to express! Regular frequent expressing is important to establish and maintain a good milk supply.
- Rotate hand positioning and continue 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 until the flow slows; then express the other side; and then repeat both sides. Mother can use either hand for either breast, and change when she tires.
- Explain that to express breastmilk adequately takes time, especially in the first few days when only a little milk may be produced.
- Choose a cup, glass, jug or jar with a wide mouth to express breastmilk into. Wash the cup in soap and water. Pour boiling water into the cup and leave it for a few minutes. Boiling water will kill most of the germs. When ready to express the breastmilk pour the water out of the cup and drain well.

Fig. 1.1 How to express breast milk.

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



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 expressions, her milk production will falter.

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

She should express at least every three hours day and night. One four hourly break overnight is acceptable.

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. If breastfeeding express after feeds – thought this may not yield much milk milk production is stimulated by the raised milk producing hormone.

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

Express as much as possible before she goes to work, to leave milk 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.

Oxytocin—the “love” hormone

When a baby is in skin-to-skin contact with her/his mother 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 with another adult, or a baby, 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 the release of this hormone.

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.

How to Stimulate the Oxytocin Reflex¹

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.
- To help her relax

It can help the mother **practically** to stimulate oxytocin release. 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.
- **Warm her breasts.**
Warming the breasts by applying a warm compress, or warm water, or have a warm shower can encourage oxytocin release/letdown. Warn her that she should test the temperature to avoid burning herself.
- **Stimulate her nipples.**
Gently pulling or rolling her nipples with her fingers can also stimulate oxytocin release.
- **Massage or stroke her breasts lightly.**
Some women find that it helps if they stroke the breast gently with her fingertips. 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 Techniques¹

Demonstrate how to rub a mother's back:



Fig. 1.2 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 inset Fig. 1.2)
- 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.