

## Using your hands to express your milk

*Inside Track* from International Lactation Consultant Association, by Anne Meerewood, PhD, MPH IBCLC, and Jane Abeel Morton, MD, FABM

Although in many countries women use breast pumps to express their milk, recent research shows that using your hands can work just as well—even better when you need to remove early milk (colostrum) in the first 3 days after birth. The following information should help you to learn this simple technique:

- It can be useful to hand express in the first 3 days because the amount of milk you remove during this time affects what you make later on: hand expressing now can boost your long term supply.
- Especially in the early days, hand expression often works better than pump suction, unless you are separated from your baby.
- Once your supply goes up, you can often get more milk if you use a pump and your hands at the same time
- Once your milk comes in or if you are apart from your baby for some time, your breasts might get hard (“engorged”). Hand expression helps you to soften the breast and get the flow of milk going. This also makes it easier for the baby to latch.
- In an emergency, you will be able to remove milk without a pump.
- If your milk supply drops, you can hand express a little bit (like a teaspoon) from each breast a dozen times a day and this should help your supply go up again.

## How do you hand express early milk?

In the first days, expect to express only drops. Keep it simple; you can express when you have a moment without trying to collect milk or worry that you are “wasting” it. The more you remove, the more you will produce later. Practice in the shower, or after you’ve put your baby down, at least 6 times a day. Here’s how to begin:

1. Place your hands over your breasts and gently massage for just a minute.
2. Form a “C” with your fingers about an inch back from the edge of the dark area around the nipple (the areola) with your nipple midway between your thumb and index (pointing) finger. Then,
  - PRESS back toward your chest
  - COMPRESS your breast with the soft pads of your thumb and index finger. Continue to press down toward the nipple
  - RELAX the pressure and start over
  - PRESS....COMPRESS....RELAX
3. Go back and forth from one breast to the other (right to left to right) with up to about 10 compressions on each breast before switching. As you learn to express your milk, you will discover the “sweet spots” where the drops will come out the easiest.
4. If you can, collect your milk into a spoon or, as you get more, into a small cup.

In the first 3 days after birth, you may see only drops. But after a few days, you will start seeing sprays of milk. As with everything, “practice makes perfect,” so hang in there until it works for you!

For the step-by-step demonstration of how to hand express, you can watch a free demo at:  
<http://newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/HandExpression.html>