

How to Hand Express Breast Milk

Hand expression is a way to release—or express—breast milk.

And you don't need any tools to do it—just your hands.

Expressing breast milk by hand is a useful skill for relieving engorged breasts and stimulating more milk production.

It may be tricky at first, just like any new skill.

But it gets easier with practice.

Here are some things you can do to prepare.

Before you start, set up in a private and comfortable place.

You might like to have a glass of water within reach.

Be mindful that it can take up to 30 minutes to hand express both breasts.

You'll want to make sure your hands and fingernails are clean.

And you can help get your milk flowing by taking a warm shower or placing a warm towel over your breasts.

Have a clean cup ready to catch any milk.

And if you plan to store the milk for later use, have some clean containers with lids ready too.

Now, here's how you express milk by hand.

Start by massaging your breast gently and slowly.

Begin at the outer areas and work in toward the nipple.

Place the clean cup under your nipple to catch any milk.

Then, place your thumb and fingers on your breast in a C-shape, so the thumb and fingers are 1 inch outside the areola.

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That's the dark area around the nipple.

Try this first with your thumb above the areola and your fingers below.

Next, press back toward your chest.

Then gently compress your thumb and fingers together without lifting them from your breast.

And release your hand.

Milk should start to release from your nipple and into the clean cup.

You may need to lean forward or tip the cup so that your milk will collect in the cup.

Keep your hand in a C-shape, and rotate it around the areola.

Start with your thumb above, then on the sides, and then below.

Repeat pressing, compressing, and releasing your hand at a steady, rhythmic pace until you're not feeling engorged.

Or until milk stops flowing.

Use the milk right away.

Or put it in a clean container, close the lid, and store it in the fridge or freezer.

If you're having trouble with hand expression, don't worry.

It's normal and may take some time to learn.

Here are some tips you can try if you're having trouble.

One: Avoid squeezing or stretching your breast or nipple.

This may cause bruising.

Instead, remember to press, compress, and release your hand.

The motion of hand expression should not rub against the breast or feel painful.

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Two: You can also try hand expressing during a regular breastfeeding once milk is already flowing.

Or try expressing from the second breast just after feeding with the first.

Three: If you're having trouble, try expressing first thing in the morning when you may have more milk available.

There's no right or wrong way to do hand expression.

Use these tips as a guide but keep practicing to see what works best for you and your body.

And talk to your doctor or lactation consultant if you're still having any problems.

They may have some other ideas for you to try.

Hand expressing breast milk is a skill that gets easier with practice.

Be patient with yourself as you learn how to do it.