

Lactation After the Loss of Your Baby

We are deeply sorry for your loss. This information may help you with your breast engorgement and lactation after the death of your baby and give you information to help you make decisions about your breast milk.

What should I do when I start producing breast milk?

When your breasts feel full of milk or uncomfortable, express a small amount to relieve the pressure. It might be helpful to use a manual pump, but you can express milk by hand, too.

A lactation consultant or nurse can show you how to express. While you're still in the hospital, you can use one of our breast pumps and milk-collection containers.

You may need to express or pump every few hours for several days or a few weeks after delivery for comfort.

Can I continue to pump beyond what is needed for comfort?

Yes, some bereaved mothers find that expressing milk on a regular basis helps them move through the grieving process. They use pumping to help them grieve and honor their connection to their baby. One mother put it this way, "When I started pumping, it made a really big difference in my mood. It wasn't that I wasn't grieving anymore but things were a lot more even" (Welborn, 2011).

What can I do to relieve breast pain?

- **Cold compresses.** Use a cold washcloth or ice pack on your breasts for 20 minutes to lessen swelling. Do not put an ice pack directly on your skin; wrap the ice in a towel first.
- **Green cabbage leaves.** Chill or freeze the leaves, rinse, and place in your bra. Change them when they wilt. Try this for 20 minutes 3 to 4 times per day.
- **Warm showers.** A warm shower may help some of the milk leak out which will lower the pressure in your breasts.
- **Pain relievers.** Take ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) for mild pain relief.
- **Express milk.** When you pump or hand-express, empty just enough milk to relieve the discomfort, usually 2 to 3 minutes. If you pump until you empty your breasts they will fill again, producing more milk.
- **Wear a supportive bra.** Wear a comfortable, supportive bra that will help support the weight of your full breasts. Avoid underwire bras as they may cause problems by blocking milk ducts, which can cause pain. Do not 'bind' (wrap tightly) your breasts.

(continued)

What can I do with the milk that I pump?

You can throw the breast milk away (ask your nurse if you need help) or donate it. Some bereaved mothers choose to continue fully expressing milk for donation to a milk bank to help feed premature and sick babies. The Human Milk Banking Association of North America (HMBANA), a non-profit organization, collects, processes, and distributes human milk across the United States and Canada. You can store your pumped milk in the freezer until you're ready to donate it.

How do I donate my breast milk?

Donating milk through a non-profit milk bank is a safe way to share your milk.

Contact the Mother's Milk Bank of Tennessee at www.mothersmilkbanktn.org or call (615) 933-8877.

There are a few steps to donate:

1. Complete a 10 to 15 minute phone screening.
2. Complete and return the information packet.
3. Have a blood test done.

All costs for screening and processing your milk are paid for by the milk bank.

If you've collected milk before or during the screening process, you can donate it.

When you complete this process, your milk can be used for premature and sick babies

To learn more

- Go to Human Milk Banking Association of North America at www.hmbana.org
- If you're having a hard time, or have questions, call your health care provider, or the Vanderbilt lactation consultants at (615) 936-1569.