

Womens and Children's Hospital

Expressed Breastmilk (EBM) for premature or unwell babies in hospital

This fact sheet provides you with information on how to safely express, store and transport your breast milk while your baby is an inpatient at the Women's and Children's Hospital.

Breastmilk is the perfect food for your baby, but it must be kept safe particularly for premature or unwell babies, who have a high risk of infection and illness.

All hospitals need to follow very strict food safety standards, which include the transport, storage and handling of EBM. The EBM processing room may not be able to process breast milk if it has not been handled in the right way.

The rules for premature and unwell infants in hospital are different from those at home.

Can I express at home and bring the breastmilk into hospital?

YES. Hospital staff will support a mother to express her breastmilk while she is separated from her baby. If you require equipment or help with expressing speak to your midwife or nurse.

How to express breast milk safely for premature or unwell babies

- > Wash your hands thoroughly before expressing or handling breastmilk or equipment.
- > Express into a sterile container that is provided by the hospital. The hospital **cannot accept** other containers or bags even if sterile.
- > Label your container with **all** the information required. Hospital staff use the label to assess a safe "use by time" for hospital use. The following information must be provided on the EBM label:
 - Patient's name
 - Patient's UR number (hospital number)
 - Date and time expressed
 - The ward the patient is in at the time.

How to store your EBM for premature or unwell babies

- > Breast milk needs to be stored safely, which means at the right temperature for the right amount of time.
- > If you cannot use your breast milk within 4 hours of expressing, make sure you either refrigerate or freeze your milk immediately.

Should I refrigerate or freeze my EBM?

The choice between refrigerating or freezing your breastmilk should be based on when the hospital will receive and use the milk.

- **Refrigerate your breastmilk if the EBM room will receive it *within 24 hours* after expressing,**

OR

- **Freeze your breastmilk if the EBM room will receive it *more than 24 hours* after expressing or if you have to travel more than 2 hours to the hospital**
- > In hospital, refrigerated “unfortified” breast milk is safe for a maximum of 48 hours, but once additions have been made in the EBM room, or if the EBM has been frozen and thawed, it **must be used within 24 hours**. (This is why the EBM room needs to receive your milk within the first 24 hours after expressing. The EBM room is only able to process breast milk once a day for use within the next 24 hours.)
- > EBM may need to be discarded if it becomes too old to be used safely.
- > Frozen breastmilk can be defrosted when needed in the hospital and is safe for 3 months if it is frozen at -18°C.

How to transport your EBM for premature or unwell babies

- > Breastmilk can be transported fresh or frozen.
- > Transport your breastmilk to the hospital in a cooler bag or esky filled with ice bricks or gel ice packs. Avoid wet ice (ice cubes) if possible. If transporting breastmilk over long distances (e.g. needing to use a courier service), ask your midwife how to safely transport your milk.
- > Ensure your labelled breastmilk is taken to the EBM room, or ward fridge as soon as possible for safe storage and handling.

Quick tips for expressing breast milk

- > Keep a good supply of milk if possible – see a lactation consultant if you are having trouble.
- > Start expressing as soon as possible after birth. Premature or unwell babies only need a small amount of milk at first, but for long term supply it is important to try to express 600-800ml in 24 hours by day 10-14 after birth. This may mean expressing 8-12 times in a 24 hour period in the first 14 days.
- > Skin to skin contact and being relaxed may help with increasing breastmilk supply.

More information

The Women’s and Children’s Hospital Expressed Breastmilk booklet

The Women’s and Children’s Hospital Breastfeeding Unit

Telephone (08) 81617971 during office hours to make an appointment

Australia Breastfeeding Association (ABA) Breastfeeding Helpline

Telephone 1800 686 268 (24 hours, 7 days a week)

Women’s and Children’s Health Network
72 King William Road
North Adelaide SA 5006
Telephone: (08) 8161 7233

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