

TIPS FOR MOTHERS WHO TEMPORARILY STOP BREASTFEEDING

Mothers who must temporarily stop breastfeeding can maintain their milk supply until it is safe to resume breastfeeding. Women who take certain medications or radioactive agents will need to pump and discard their milk until the unwanted substance is clear from the milk. Women who have infected lesions on their breasts, such as superficial boils, impetigo, and herpes simplex, should not breastfeed until the lesions are completely cleared.

When breastfeeding is temporarily withheld while awaiting a galactosemia or PKU diagnosis in the infant, the mother may save the milk for her baby or donate it to a milk bank.

Milk supply is determined by how often and how well milk is removed from the breast and by how much time is spent expressing or pumping the milk. The most efficient way to remove milk is to use a hospital-grade electric pump with a double pumping kit. Pumping both breasts at the same time makes pumping sessions shorter and increases prolactin, the hormone that makes milk. Other options include single pumping (one breast at a time) with an electric, battery or manual pump, and hand expression. A mother can make any pump more effective by briefly massaging her breasts and hand expressing several times during a pumping session. It is helpful if the mother follows a pumping routine.

If the temporary weaning occurs after breastfeeding has been well established, the mother should express or pump as often as the baby was breastfeeding. For example, if the baby was breastfeeding ten times a day, mom should pump ten times a day. The mother should begin expressing or pumping as soon as possible whenever breastfeeding is interrupted. Some women have been able to maintain their milk supply by pumping 5 - 8 times per 24 hours for a total of 90-125 minutes.

If breastfeeding must be withheld when the baby is less than two weeks old, the mother should start with at least eight pumping sessions in 24 hours, including one between midnight and 4 AM. Colostrum, the first milk, is concentrated and comes in very small quantities; about a teaspoon to a tablespoon per pumping is excellent. Milk production gradually increases during the first week. Mothers should pump for time, not quantity, pumping each breast for ten to fifteen minutes at each session. The purpose of pumping at this time is to minimize engorgement and to stimulate milk production.

Any woman who must withhold breastfeeding temporarily should be referred to a lactation consultant, peer counselor, or breastfeeding support group. After temporary weaning, the baby may need some coaxing to resume feeding at the breast. There are techniques moms can learn to help babies make the transition back to the breast.