

# Storage and Use of Breastmilk

## Containers for Storing Breastmilk:

- ❖ Breastmilk should be stored in clean\* glass or polypropylene containers with a tight fitting lid. These containers keep the quality of your breastmilk best.
- \***Clean:** The collection container can be washed in hot soapy water and rinsed or washed in a dishwasher.
- ❖ Breastmilk can be stored in plastic bags specifically made for storing breastmilk. Always follow the instructions on the package.
- ❖ Bottle liner bags should **not be used** for breastmilk storage as they are made of thinner plastic that may break when frozen.
- ❖ Always label each container with the date and time you expressed/pumped your milk.

## Storage Times for Breastmilk:

Location of storage	Temperature	Healthy Term Infants:	NICU & High Risk Infants:
		Source ABM clinical protocol #8 (March 2010)	Source Human Milk Banking Association of North America(HMBNA) (2011)
		Maximum recommended breastmilk storage time	Maximum recommended breastmilk storage time
<b>Room Temperature</b>	16-29 C (60-85 F)	Ideal: 3-4 hours Acceptable: 6-8 hrs under very clean conditions	Ideal: refrigerate immediately Acceptable: no more than 4hrs
<b>Refrigerator</b>	less than or equal to 4 C (39 F)	Ideal: 72 hrs Acceptable: 5-8 days under very clean conditions	Ideal: 2-4 days
<b>Freezer</b>	less than - 17 C (0 F)	Ideal: 6 months Acceptable:12 months	Ideal: 1-3 months Acceptable: no more than 12 months in deep freezer

FACT SHEET fact sheet

## Using Refrigerated or Frozen Breastmilk:

- ❖ Use the oldest milk first. Make sure that the milk has not passed the recommended storage time. If the milk has passed the recommended storage time, it should be thrown out.
  - ❖ Do not heat or defrost breastmilk in a microwave. Microwaving breastmilk will destroy its vitamins and protective properties. Microwave ovens heat unevenly. Hot spots can burn your infant's mouth.
  - ❖ If warming thawed or refrigerated breastmilk, place the container into a clean resealable food storage bag and put it into a bowl of warm water.
  - ❖ If using frozen breastmilk:
    1. Thaw in the refrigerator and **use within 24 hours**
    2. Warm, by placing the container in a clean resealable storage bag and place in a bowl of warm water for 5 minutes.
    3. Once warmed for the feeding, **use within 1 hour** or throw it away.
- OR**
1. Thaw **frozen** breastmilk by placing the container into a clean resealable food storage bag before placing it under cool running water.
  2. Once the milk has started to thaw, place the container in a bowl of warm water for about 5 minutes, to complete thawing and to warm the milk.
- ❖ Gently mix warmed milk before use to blend any fat that has risen to the top.
  - ❖ Do not refreeze thawed breastmilk.

## Tips for Storing Breastmilk:

### A. For the Healthy Term Infant:

- ❖ If you need to combine breastmilk from multiple expressed/pumping sessions, chill the breastmilk to the same temperature before adding it together. Label the container with the earliest date and time expressed/pumped.
- ❖ Avoid wasting breastmilk by storing small amounts and feed according to your infant's feeding cues.
- ❖ Fill the container  $\frac{3}{4}$  full. Space is required to allow room for expansion when the breastmilk freezes.
- ❖ Store the breastmilk container at the back of the refrigerator or freezer where it is coldest but away from the fan.

## B. For the NICU or High Risk Infant:

### For Oral Immune Therapy (OIT):

- Talk to your infant's bedside nurse about how to give oral immune therapy
- See the handout titled: What is Colostrum? (LHSC only)

- ❖ Volumes less than 1 ml. should be stored in a 1 ml. syringe and capped with a syringe tip cap and labeled with name, date and time.
- ❖ Volumes over 1 ml. should be stored in 3, 5 or 10 ml. syringes and capped with a syringe tip cap and labeled with name, date and time.
- ❖ Once you are expressing/pumping more than 10 mls of breastmilk ask your infant's bedside nurse for the appropriate storage containers.

### Transporting Breastmilk:

- ❖ Containers of breastmilk should be packed with frozen gel packs in an insulated bag or picnic cooler.
- ❖ **Do not use ice** to pack your breastmilk as ice freezes at a higher temperature so it will actually thaw frozen breastmilk.
- ❖ Carry breastmilk in the trunk of your vehicle during the winter and in the passenger area during the summer.
- ❖ As soon as you arrive at your infant's bedside, tell your infant's nurse that you have brought breastmilk with you.

### References:

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Spatz, D. (2015). The use of human milk and breastfeeding in the neonatal intensive care unit. In K. Wambach & J. Riordan (Eds), *Breastfeeding and human lactation*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (pp. 469-521). Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning

Rojjanasrirat, W & Wambach, K. (2015). General guidelines for Storing Human Milk. In Wambach, K. & Riordan, J. *Breastfeeding and Human Lactation* 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. 16: 647.

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