

Human Milk Storage

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The American Academy of Paediatrics and World Health Organization highlight the importance of breastfeeding for mothers and babies. However there are times when mothers and babies are separated due to work or other commitments. Providing expressed milk allows your baby to continue to thrive and obtain the health benefits of human milk.

Research indicates that human milk has unique properties that protect it from bacterial contamination. Studies show that expressed milk can stay fresher longer than previously thought.

The following guidelines apply to mothers who:

- Have full term babies in good health
- Carry out good hand washing before expressing
- Are storing their milk for home use (not for a sick or premature baby in hospital, this requires more stringent guidelines.)
- Use sterile or clean containers for milk collection. Clean containers must have been washed with soap and hot water. Rinse well with boiling water and allow to air dry.

Storage Guidelines

- Milk should be labeled and dated prior to storage.
- Store milk in quantities the baby is likely to take to minimize wastage. A breastfed baby will average between 60 to 120 ml (2 to 4 ounces) per feed 8 to 12 times per day.
- Always store milk near the back of the refrigerator/freezer where the temperature is more stable. Do not store human milk in the door.
- Milk remaining from a feed that was thawed and warmed must be discarded.
- Thawed milk can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours but not refrozen.
- Remember, the composition and properties of human milk alter with your baby's age and changing requirements. Therefore, match the "age" of your milk as closely as possible to your baby's actual age. Milk expressed when the baby was 2 months old would have a different ratio of nutrients than the baby needs at 4 months of age.
- Storage guidelines differ depending on the temperature variations.

Mature milk at room temperature

- Kept at 15 C (59-60 F) – 24 hours
- Kept at 19-22 C (66-71 F) – 10 hours
- Kept at 25 C (79 F) – 4-8 hours
- Refrigerated 0-4 C (32 – 39 F) 2-5 days

Frozen milk

- In a freezer section located within the refrigerator – 2 weeks

- A separate door/freezer section connected to the refrigerator – use within 1 month preferably
- In a deep freezer – use with 6 months

Types of Containers For Storing Milk

- Heavy plastic or glass containers with tightly capped lids
- Specifically designed milk storage bags

Types of Containers for Freezing Milk

- Glass is the recommended container for freezing milk, because it is the least porous. This provides for better protection of the milk.
- Clear, hard plastic (polycarbonate) is the next choice.
- Cloudy, hard plastic (polypropylene) is the third choice.
- Leave space in the container for the expansion of the milk when it freezes.
- Tighten the cap after freezing, once displaced air has escaped.

Warming Milk

- Human milk does not need to be warmed. Take the chill off cold milk and bring it to body temperature.
- Thaw under warm running water or set in a pan of warm water.
- Do not use a microwave oven to heat human milk. Valuable components of the milk are lost if overheated. Uneven heating caused by microwaves can burn your baby's mouth.
- Separation of the fat in human milk is normal. Shake gently to mix and check temperature before using.

Additional recommendations

- Do not thaw human milk at room temperature.
- Freshly expressed milk can be added to frozen milk if cooled first and a lesser amount than the frozen milk.
- If freshly expressed milk is going to be used within the recommended storage guidelines, refrigeration is preferable to freezing. Freezing human milk does result in the loss of some antibacterial properties.

References

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