Properly Storing Breast Milk

If you are breastfeeding, there are times when you may want to leave expressed (*pre-pumped*) breast milk with a caregiver. This allows your infant's nutritional needs to continue to be met while you are away. Breast milk is a living fluid with active cells and antibodies that need some special handling to insure optimal effectiveness in protecting your baby against infections. These antibacterial properties will help your breast milk stay fresh longer and also work to prevent bacterial growth in the milk itself when it is stored.

The guidelines suggested below are for milk that will be fed to healthy, full-term babies.

HUMAN MILK STORAGE GUIDELINES FOR FRESHLY EXPRESSED MILK

- Room temperature of 60-85º F.....3-4 hours is ideal, but 6-8 hours is acceptable if the pump parts and containers are well cleaned.
- In a refrigerator at less than 39º F.....3 days is ideal. Up to 8 days if the pump parts and containers are well cleaned.
- In a freezer compartment inside a refrigerator.....2 weeks.
- In a freezer unit with a separate door.....3-4 months.
- In a deep freeze.....6-12 months.

Previously frozen milk that has been thawed can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours, but should not be refrozen. Frozen human milk should be stored in the back of the freezer to prevent possible temperature changes (*fluctuations*) due to the opening of the door.

STORAGE CONTAINERS

- Store the milk you plan to freeze in glass or hard plastic containers. Plastic bags specially designed for milk storage may also be used. Many women find these advantageous as they take up less space and can be attached directly to the breast pump for milk collection.
- Leave an inch or so at the top of the bag or bottle so the milk has room to expand as it freezes.
- Store your milk in 2-4 ounce serving sizes. This will make it easier to thaw and will help you avoid having to discard milk your baby does not drink.
- Place your freshly expressed milk in a refrigerator, if possible. If one is not available, you can place it in an insulated cooler with ice packs for up to 24 hours.

THAWING FROZEN BREAST MILK

- Frozen milk can be thawed in a refrigerator, under warm running tap water, or in a pan of warm water heated on the stove.
- **Do not** heat milk directly on the stove or in a microwave as this will destroy some of the infection fighting properties.
- If you want to add freshly pumped milk to frozen milk, you can do so as long as you add less fresh milk than what is already frozen. Chill the fresh milk in your refrigerator for 30 minutes before adding it to the milk in the freezer.
- Always label each container with the date and time it was expressed so you use the milk in the order it was pumped for your baby.

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