

Breast Milk Storage Guidelines

Many mothers find it convenient or even necessary to collect their breast milk and store it to be used at a later time. This is often the case for mothers who are returning to work or school or for mothers who are separated from their infants. These guidelines will answer some of the questions you might have about safely storing your expressed breast milk.

How should I collect the milk?

- Wash your hands before expressing or handling breast milk.
- Use new, clean collection bottles for each pumping session.
- While your baby is hospitalized, you should use the small (80ml) milk storage bottles provided by the hospital.
- Screw the bottles directly onto the pump kit.
- Keep the inside of the bottle cap clean while pumping and screw on tightly when finished.

How should I store the milk?

- Store your expressed breast milk in clean containers.
- If your baby is hospitalized, use the small (80ml) screw cap bottles provided by the hospital. These bottles connect directly to the pump kit so milk can be pumped and stored into the same bottles.
- If you are storing milk at home, you can use hard plastic cups with tight caps or heavy-duty bags designed for breast milk collection. Pour the expressed milk from the bottle into the storage container.
- Avoid using ordinary plastic storage bags or formula bottle bags, as these can easily leak or spill.

- Clearly label the milk with the date it was expressed, and use the oldest milk first.
- If delivering breast milk to a child care provider, clearly label the container with your child's name and date.
- If delivering breast milk to the hospital, clearly label each bottle with your **baby's name, registration number, date and time of pumping**. Your baby's nurse can provide you with printed labels as needed.

Can I add freshly expressed breast milk to previously cooled or frozen breast milk?

Freshly expressed breast milk should be chilled completely in the refrigerator before adding to previously cooled or frozen milk.

How do I thaw frozen breast milk?

- You can gradually thaw frozen breast milk by transferring it to the refrigerator. Frozen breast milk can also be thawed by placing the bottle in a container of warm water.
- Once completely thawed, breast milk should be used within 24 hours. Do not save milk from a used bottle for another feeding.
- Avoid using a microwave oven to thaw or heat bottles of breast milk
 - Microwave ovens do not heat liquids evenly. Uneven heating could easily scald a baby or damage the milk
- **Do not re-freeze breast milk once it has been thawed.**

How do I prepare thawed breast milk for feeding?

- Place the container of thawed breast milk into a cup of warm water.
- Breast milk warmed to room temperature should be used within 1 hour.
- Swirl bottle gently before feeding your baby.

Storage Time for Fresh Breast Milk for Use with Healthy Full Term Infants

Location	Temperature	Duration	Comments
Countertop, table	Room temperature (up to 77°F or 25°C)	6–8 hours	Containers should be covered and kept as cool as possible; covering the container with a cool towel may keep milk cooler.
Insulated cooler bag	5-39°F or -15-4°C	24 hours	Keep ice packs in contact with milk containers at all times, limit opening cooler bag.
Refrigerator	39°F or 4°C	5 days	Store milk in the back of the main body of the refrigerator.
Freezer			Store milk toward the back of the freezer, where temperature is most constant. Milk stored for longer durations in the ranges listed is safe, but some of the fat in the milk can undergo changes that may lower the quality or change the taste of the milk.
Freezer compartment of a refrigerator	5°F or -15°C	2 weeks	
Freezer compartment of refrigerator with separate doors	0°F or -18°C	3–6 months	
Chest or upright deep freezer	-4°F or -20°C	6–12 months	
Reference: Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine. (2004), Center for Disease Control (2010)			

Storage Time for Fresh Breast Milk for Use with Premature or Hospitalized Infants

Location	Temperature	Duration	Comments
Countertop, table	Room temperature (up to 77°F or 25°C)	Avoid	It is safest to refrigerate right away. Note: Bringing milk that is refrigerated and cooled is safer than bringing frozen milk to the hospital.
Insulated cooler bag	5-39°F or -15-4°C	24 hours	Keep ice packs in contact with milk containers at all times, limit opening cooler bag. Recommended for transporting milk to the hospital.
Refrigerator	39°F or 4°C	Up to 48 hours	Store milk in the back of the main body of the refrigerator.
Freezer			
Freezer compartment of a refrigerator	5°F or -15°C	2 weeks	Store milk toward the back of the freezer, where temperature is most constant. Milk stored for longer durations in the ranges listed is safe, but some of the fat in the milk can undergo changes that may lower the quality or change the taste of the milk.
Freezer compartment of refrigerator with separate doors	0°F or -18°C	2–3 months	
Chest or upright deep freezer	-4°F or -20°C	Less than 3 months is optimal	
Reference: Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine. (2004), Center for Disease Control (2010)			

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