

Guidelines for collecting and storing breast milk for infants in the NICU

It isn't unusual for twins, triplets or more to be born preterm (i.e. before 38 weeks) and as a result, have to spend days, weeks or even months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). For those families wishing to breastfeed, it is possible to do so by pumping and bringing in breast milk to the NICU to be fed to their babies. The gathering and storing of breastmilk can be confusing. To ensure the best quality milk for your babies, here are some recommended collecting and storage guidelines of breast milk. Remember that *every drop counts* and whatever amount is collected is the *best thing for your infants and you can feel proud of your efforts*. If you have any questions regarding your milk supply or how to conserve it, be sure to ask the NICU staff.

Storage and Sterilization

1. Purchase some *bottles and labels* to store the milk. The bottles need to be boiled and sterilized before each use. Bags are not appropriate for storing milk in the NICU.
2. Clearly label each bottle, including the babies' names, date and time that the breast milk was collected.
3. Ideally prepare bottles of 1 ounce, 2 ounces or 4 ounces, if you can, for storage.
4. Do not overfill the bottles as breast milk expands when it is frozen.
5. Make sure all pump material is properly cleaned and sterilized between uses.
6. In an insulated cooler with ice packs, breast milk can be stored for one day.

Storage Times of Breast Milk for Preterm Infants*

		Storage time
Freshly expressed milk	Room temperature 25C/77F	4 to 6 hours (if room is warm, use in 4 hours)
Refrigerated milk (Store at back of fridge, not in door) 4C or 39F	a) Refrigerator (fresh milk)	a) Up to 5 days, but 3 days is optimal
	b) Refrigerator (thawed milk)	b) 24 hours
Frozen Milk (Store at back of freezer, not in door. DO NOT REFREEZE)	a) Freezer compartment inside refrigerator	a) NOT RECOMMENDED
	b) Freezer compartment with separate door	b) 3 Months
	c) Deep freezer, not attached to refrigerator	c) Up to 12 months, but 6 months is optimal.
Transporting Milk (Fresh, refrigerated or frozen) 15C or 60F	Packed in insulated cooler with ice or "blue ice"	24 hours

Transporting Breast Milk to NICU

Fresh breast milk can be refrigerated and transported to the NICU *on ice* or “blue ice” packs in a little insulated cooler. Once at the NICU, give your labelled breast milk to the nurse in charge of your babies to be placed in the refrigerator or freezer.

If you have any questions regarding these procedures or about breastfeeding in general, be sure to talk to the nurse in charge of your babies. Hospital staff will be most happy to answer your questions and help you at any point.

If you have any questions regarding pumping or storing your breast milk, do not hesitate to discuss them with the nurse or lactation consultant.

Your breast milk is important to your babies. Save ALL the milk that you pump.

References

*[Information from Mayo Clinic – Breastmilk Storage Do’s and Don’ts](#)

- 1) Hamosh M, Ellis LA, Pollock Dr., Henderson TR and Hamosh P. Breastfeeding and the working mother: effect of time and temperature of short-term storage on proteolysis, lipolysis, and bacterial growth in milk. Pediatrics Vol. 97, issue 4 pp. 492-498
- 2) Lauwers J, Shinskie D., Counseling the Nursing Mother: A Lactation Consultant’s Guide, 3rd edition p.351
- 3) Riordan Jan, Breastfeeding and Human Lactation, 3rd edition. p.378-382
- 4) [Pumping, Storing & Transporting Breast Milk for Infants in the NICU, Wexner Medical Center](#)
- 5) [Breastmilk: Pumping, Collecting, Storing – University of Rochester Medical Center](#)

Additional Resources

Finding Our Way: Life with Triplets, Quadruplets and Quintuplets, Triplets, Quads & Quints Assoc., 2001

Mothering Multiples: Breastfeeding & Caring for Twins or More, Karen Kerkhoff Gromada, La Leche League Int’l, Revised Edition, 2007

When You’re Expecting Twins, Triplets or Quads: Proven Guidelines for a Healthy Multiple Pregnancy, Barbara Luke and Tamara Eberlein, Third Edition, Harper Collins, 2011

The Joy of Twins and Other Multiple Births, Pamela Patrick Novotny, Crown Trade Paperbacks, Inc., 1994

Double Duty, Christina Baglivi Tinglof, Second edition, McGraw-Hill Books, 2009

From Valerie Lavigne - Mom of three breastfed babies, including twins.

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Recommended Sources of Information:

La Leche League of Canada Referral Service
www.lalecheleague.org

Lactation Consulting Services Canada

MBC Breastfeeding Peer Support Network

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