

Directions for Breastmilk Storage

For Healthy, Full-Term Babies

What are the best storage containers for breast milk?

Glass or non-polycarbonate plastic bottles
Custom-purpose breastmilk storage bags

How long can I

Leave my freshly-expressed milk at room temperature?

Optimal: 4 hours at 60-85 degrees F (16-29C)
6-8 hours acceptable under very clean conditions

Store milk in the refrigerator?

Optimal: 4 days at 39 degrees F (4C)
5-8 days under very clean conditions

*Store milk in the freezer?**

Optimal: 6 months at <25 degrees F (<4C). Store away from the door and from the walls if self-defrosting. 12 months acceptable.

*In order to make sure your milk is storing well defrost a bottle after a week and make sure your baby accepts it. See the last paragraph re lipase problems.

Can I combine milk from different pump sessions? Yes, but cool each batch first and store according to the age of the oldest milk. It is best to freeze your milk in small quantities (2 to 4 ounces depending on the age of your baby) within 2 days of expressing. Leave room in the container for expansion when freezing, and date each container. As your milk cools, the cream may form a thin layer on the surface. Swirl to redistribute the cream after you warm the milk.

Is the milk pumped at night different? Nighttime milk contains more melatonin helping your newborn develop a circadian rhythm.

How do I heat breast milk? Microwaving destroys some of the anti-infective properties of the breast milk and may create "hot spots" that could burn your baby. Your baby may accept milk straight from the refrigerator, but this can reduce the core body temperature of a small infant. Place the container of milk in a bowl of warm water, or place under the hot water faucet, and bring to room temperature.

Can I reuse leftover milk? Many mothers refrigerate milk the baby did not finish and use it at the very next feed. If you have any doubt, discard the milk.

How do I thaw frozen milk? Thaw overnight in the fridge, or place the container of breast milk in a cup of warm water. Use the milk immediately or refrigerate for up to 24 hours. Do not refreeze.

Why does my frozen milk smell unpleasant when I thaw it? Lipase, the enzyme that digests fats, stays active when milk is frozen. Some mothers have a high level of this enzyme and their milk smells and tastes soapy when thawed. The milk is not harmful but the baby may refuse it. If you have this problem you may need to scald your milk before storage.