

Storing and Thawing Expressed Breastmilk

The USDA Infant Nutrition and Feeding Guide recommends the following for safe storage and warming of breastmilk.

Expressed breastmilk is a perishable food which must be stored right for safe consumption. The following guidelines are recommended to prevent contamination of breastmilk.

Storing Breast Milk

- Store your breastmilk in clean glass bottles, hard plastic bottles or disposable plastic nursing bags tightly capped after filling.
- Do not use ordinary plastic bags or infant formula bottle bags since they may crack and leak.
- Put just 2 to 4 ounces in each container or the amount you think your baby will take at a feeding.
- Some 1 ounce portions can be frozen for times when your baby may want extra milk.
- When filling a bottle, leave room (about 1 inch) at the top because breastmilk expands when it freezes.
- Never add fresh breastmilk to already frozen breastmilk.

Refrigerator and Freezer Storage

- Put the date and your baby's name on the container so caregivers use the oldest milk first.
- You can store breastmilk in the refrigerator (temperature of 39° F or less) for 2 days. It is best to store it in the back (coldest) part of the refrigerator.
- Freeze your breastmilk if you won't use it within 48 hours.
- Frozen breastmilk should be stored in the back of the freezer where the temperature is at 0° F. It can be stored for 3-6 months.
- If traveling with bottles of expressed breastmilk, store them in a cooler with ice or an ice pack.

Thawing or Warming

Once frozen breastmilk is thawed, it should be refrigerated and used within 24 hours and should not be refrozen.

Milk should be thawed quickly. To thaw and warm a container of frozen breastmilk:

- hold the bottle under running lukewarm water.
- shake the bottle gently to mix (breastmilk separates into a fatty layer and a watery layer when it is stored).
- avoid too much heat or shaking because heat will damage the protective parts in the milk, and very hard shaking will cause the milk fat to separate out.

Test the temperature before feeding your baby to make sure that it isn't too hot or too cold (test by squirting a couple of drops onto the back of your hand).

Thaw or warm only as much breastmilk as you think will be needed for a feeding. Thawed breastmilk must be used within 24 hours. If not used by then, it needs to be thrown away.

Do not refreeze breastmilk that has been thawed.

Do not thaw or heat breastmilk in a microwave oven. The milk in the bottle may become very hot when heated in a microwave even though the bottle feels cool. Babies have been burned while being fed liquids warmed in a microwave oven.

Heating the milk too hot destroys the immunities in the milk.

These guidelines should not be used for formula.

