

Breast Milk Storage & Thawing Guidelines for Healthy, Full-term Babies*

Confused about how long to store your expressed breast milk? You're not alone. Even well-respected health care organizations can't seem to agree on how long breast milk can be safely stored (see table below).

So what's a mother to do? Keep it simple. Handle your breast milk the same way you care for other foods. Store your milk in a cool place, refrigerate it as soon as possible, and freeze it for later use. Because storage time and temperature can affect the nutrients in breast milk, follow these simple guidelines:

- Store your milk in any clean, glass or BPA-free plastic container made for food.
- Label the container with the date, the time, your baby's name and your name.
- Place a single serving in each container. Allow room for expansion, if you plan to freeze your milk.
- Store your milk in the back of the refrigerator or freezer, away from the door.
- Store your milk in a cool room for up to 4 hours, in a refrigerator for up to 4 days, in a freezer with a separate door for up to 6 months, and in an upright or chest freezer for up to 12 months.
- To thaw your milk, place the unopened container in the refrigerator or in a pan of warm water.
- Do not thaw or warm any milk for your baby in a microwave oven. A microwave oven destroys nutrients and creates hot spots that can burn your baby's mouth.



Room
Up to 4 hours
at 77°F (25°C)
or colder

Freezer
Up to 6 months
at 0°F (-18°C)
or colder



Refrigerator
Up to 5 days
at 40°F
(4°C) or colder



Chest Freezer
Up to 12 months
at -4°F (-20°C)
or colder

Breast milk storage guidelines from the
Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women,
Infants, and Children (WIC)

*Mothers of hospitalized infants should follow the hospital's guidelines for milk storage.

- Milk that has been thawed at room temperature should be used within 2 hours. Milk that has been thawed in the refrigerator should be used within 24 hours.
- No heating is needed for refrigerated breast milk but if your baby prefers milk at room temperature, place the unopened container in a pan of warm water for several minutes.
- If a feeding is cut short, any milk left in the feeding container (bottle or cup) can be used within 2 hours to complete the feeding.
- Once a feeding is complete, any milk left in the feeding container should be thrown away.



Store your milk in any clean, glass or BPA-free container made for food.

If storing milk at a daycare or workplace, label with your name and your baby's name.



Source	Countertop or Table 77°F (25°C) or colder	Refrigerator 40°F (4°C) or colder	Freezer 0°F (-18°C) or colder
Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) © 2010	Up to 4 hours is ideal Up to 8 hours is acceptable	Up to 3 days is ideal Up to 8 days is acceptable	Up to 6 months is best Up to 12 months is acceptable
American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) © 2011	Up to 4 hours	Up to 4 days	Up to 6 months
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) © 2010	Up to 8 hours	Up to 5 days	Up to 6 months
Human Milk Banking Association of North America (HMBANA) © 2011	Up to 6 hours	Up to 5 days	Up to 6 months is best Up to 12 months is acceptable
Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) © 2016	Up to 4 hours	Up to 4 days	Up to 6 months is best Up to 12 months is acceptable