



## Breast Milk Storage and 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 on next page).

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 container (glass or BPA-free plastic) made for food.
- Label the container with the date and time.
- 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 4 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 Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

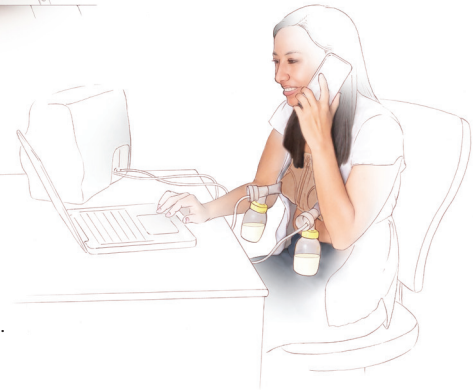
\*Mothers of hospitalized infants should follow the hospital's guidelines for milk storage.

- 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 container (glass or BPE-free plastic) made for food.

If storing milk at a day care or workplace, label with your name and your baby's name, as well as the date and time.



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 ideal 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 ideal 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

Adapted with permission from *BREASTFEEDING: Keep It Simple* (5th ed.) by Amy Spangler © 2020



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