

We are so sorry your baby has died.

Your healthcare team have given you this leaflet to help you decide on a plan for your lactation and milk supply. You can use this leaflet as a tool to discuss and decide what is best for you. You do not need to make any decisions right away.

Why am I producing milk?

Your body starts the process of lactation from 16 weeks of pregnancy (lactogenesis). Meaning, from this point onwards, you may produce milk after the birth of your baby, no matter your gestation. This is due to hormonal changes that take place after pregnancy.

Your milk may increase in volume 2-5 days after your baby's birth. Your breasts may feel full and leak milk. Some women experience a slight fever or firm, painful breasts (engorgement). Everyone's experiences are different.

Friends and family may want to hug you. If you find this painful, you can fold an arm across your chest to protect your breasts and make hugs more comfortable.

Everybody goes through grief differently so it's important you are given the information you need to make a choice about your lactation that is right for you. There is no right or wrong way.

You may have different feelings about your milk. It may represent an ongoing connection with your baby, or it may feel like a painful reminder of what you have lost.

Some bereaved mothers wish to stop their milk production and others prefer to keep lactating for a while.

Finding a milk bank:

UK Association for Milk Banking:
www.ukamb.org/milk-banks

Sources of support:

Bliss
www.bliss.org.uk/parents/coping-with-loss

Child Bereavement UK
www.childbereavementuk.org/

Lullaby Trust
www.lullabytrust.org.uk/bereavement-support/

SANDS
www.sands.org.uk/

The Compassionate Friends
www.tcf.org.uk/

Care for the Family
www.careforthefamily.org.uk/

Child Death Helpline
www.childdeathhelpline.org.uk/

Life After Loss
www.lifeafterloss.org.uk

Saying Goodbye
www.sayinggoodbye.org/



Lactation choices after bereavement

You can use this leaflet to help you discuss and decide what is important to you

What if I do not want to continue producing milk?

You may find producing milk to be too distressing and want to stop lactation as soon as possible. You will naturally stop producing milk if you do not stimulate your breasts.

Medication to “dry up” your milk may be discussed with you, but it is worth noting these can cause side effects and may not completely stop you producing milk.

We would recommend you reduce your supply gradually. If you stop too quickly, you may experience blocked ducts and mastitis—a painful breast infection (www.nhs.uk/conditions/mastitis).

Ways to reduce your supply comfortably:

- Hand express just enough milk to make your breasts feel comfortable (<https://youtu.be/WlRhDf-2d8w>).
- Take warm showers and allow your milk to leak
- Wear a well-fitting, non-wired bra to support your breasts without constricting the ducts
- Place cool pads or cloths on your breasts to provide pain relief to swelling
- Use pain relief like paracetamol and ibuprofen as needed, unless instructed not to (follow care giver/ manufactures’ instructions).

It is not recommended that you bind your breasts to stop your milk production, as this can cause blocked ducts and mastitis.

What if I want to express my milk?

You may want to express and establish a short- or long-term milk supply as it may provide comfort for you during this time. Lactating can also have long-term health benefits for you (such as decreasing the risk of certain cancers, such as breast and ovarian cancer, and osteoporosis). It can also help contract your uterus back in shape and size.

You can express your milk by hand or pump and can continue to do so for as long as is comfortable for you. Your healthcare team can support you with this.

Initially, it is recommended you express regularly—around eight times a day or every 3 hours – if you wish to build up your supply. You can then reduce this after the first few weeks to as often as you wish.

You may have already expressed milk which is frozen at home or in the hospital. Some mothers decide to use for other children, or topically on their own skin. Others are not ready to make a decision and will keep it at home until they are ready to decide. The milk bank needs to pasteurise milk within 3 months of it being expressed.

You may wish to use your breast milk in memory of your baby. You can use your milk to create jewellery—there are many companies that offer this service.

You may also consider donating expressed milk to help premature babies, via a milk bank.

“I was given different options on what to do with the milk I had produced for my baby by the breastfeeding specialist within the hospital. As I had a lot of expressed milk already I thought it would be such a waste to just dispose of it, the idea of another baby benefiting from the milk seemed to soothe me. I would definitely recommend it to another grieving mother.”

Snowdrop Donor

What if I want to donate my milk?

The milk you express could be used to help another family. You may wish to donate your milk in memory of your baby. This may be a one-off donation of an expressed supply you already have frozen, or you may want to continue to donate.

Milk bank staff will be able to talk you through the process of donating and give further information on what is involved.

There are a few exclusions to donating breast milk and each milk bank can discuss these with you.

Exclusions may include:

- Smoking or use of nicotine replacement
- Some medications

It might be possible for your milk to be used in other ways, such as for older infants, or for research. You can contact milk banks directly or ask your healthcare team to get in touch first to work out what is possible.

There are contact details on the back of this leaflet for the UK Association for Milk Banking. You can find a list of milk banks in the UK on its website: www.ukamb.org/milk-banks.

At the Hearts Milk Bank, mothers who donate after bereavement become Snowdrop Donors. Snowdrops are planted to remember each baby in tribute to their

Donating milk felt like something I could do for Ezra, even though he was gone—it felt like something we were doing together. Knowing we were helping other babies added to my belief that, however short, his life made a difference in the world. He has a legacy.”

Snowdrop Donor