

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. The milk bank needs to pasteurise milk within 3 months of it being expressed.

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

If these exclusions apply to you, 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.

Mothers who donate after bereavement to the Hearts Milk Bank become Snowdrop Donors. Snowdrops, otherwise known as the Milk Flower, are planted as a tribute to each baby and to recognise the precious gift of milk.

"Donating milk felt like something I could do for our baby, 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

Sources of support:

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

Child Bereavement UK
childbereavementuk.org

Lullaby Trust
lullabytrust.org.uk/bereavement-support

SANDS
sands.org.uk

The Compassionate Friends
tcf.org.uk

Care for the Family
careforthefamily.org.uk

Child Death Helpline
childdeathhelpline.org.uk

Life After Loss
lifeafterloss.org.uk

Saying Goodbye
sayinggoodbye.org

Finding a milk bank:

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



Lactation choices after bereavement

You can use this leaflet to help you discuss and decide what to do.

We are so sorry your baby has died.

Your healthcare team has 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). 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 experiences 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.

What if I do not want to continue producing milk?

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

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

We 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 (bit.ly/3Sd4XFc).
- 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 help relieve painful swelling.
- Use pain relief like paracetamol and ibuprofen as needed, unless instructed not to (follow care giver/manufacturer's instructions).

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

"We will always be grateful for this opportunity. The milk bank team were with us at every step, and helped us make every decision in our own time"

Snowdrop Donor

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.

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.

If you wish to build up your supply, it is recommended that you express regularly, around eight times a day or every 3 hours. 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. There are a number of ways that expressed milk can be used. Some families are not ready to make a decision, and you don't need to make a decision immediately.

You may wish to use your breast milk in memory of your baby. You can use your milk to keepsakes, such as in a piece of 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