



Expressed breastmilk feeding in emergencies

Providing breastmilk to your baby or toddler is a powerful way of preparing for an emergency and making your family more resilient to disasters. Learn how to hand express and pack an evacuation kit with paper cups or single use bottles so you can safely feed your baby even if you have no clean water, electricity or gas.

Your expressed breastmilk provides your baby with safe water and food, and protection from infections. However, you may not be able to use your usual expressing and feeding equipment during an emergency, especially if there is no clean water or electricity.

How to prepare

- **Learn how to hand express** so you can provide your baby with breastmilk without needing to use a breast pump. The Australian Breastfeeding Association's fact sheet on Hand expressing in emergencies will help.
- **Pack an evacuation kit** that includes paper cups to collect your expressed breastmilk. These cups can also be used to feed your baby, or pack single-use bottles if you prefer. Include food and water for you to drink and wash your hands with, as well as soap and items for your baby. The Australian Breastfeeding Association's evacuation kit list for babies fed expressed breastmilk lists everything you need to care for your baby for 3 days.
- **Make an emergency plan** that includes leaving early and evacuating to a family or friend's home rather than an evacuation centre, if possible.

What to expect

During the disruption of an emergency, your baby may:

- want to feed more often
- want to be held more by you
- wake more often overnight.

You can be confident that you will make enough milk for your baby if you express often and do not become dehydrated. Stress cannot reduce your milk supply, but it can slow the flow of milk. It may take longer than usual to express milk and you may need to express more often.

What to do

During and after an emergency, drink water regularly. Aim to express milk at least as often as your baby feeds. Look for the following signs to know that your baby is drinking enough milk:

- Your baby has at least 5 heavily wet disposable nappies (or at least 6 wet cloth nappies) in 24 hours
- Their wee is pale (not dark) in colour and has little to no smell
- Their poo is runny (if they are only having breastmilk) or soft (if they are also eating some solid foods).

If your baby needs more breastmilk, expressing more often will increase your milk supply. You can even return to just feeding your older baby breastmilk if suitable solid foods are not available.

Try to relax when you express to encourage the flow of milk. Take slow, deep breaths and think about how much you love your baby. It may help to keep your baby close so you can see, hear and smell them while you express. Skin-to-skin contact with your baby is another way to help your milk to flow.



Australian Breastfeeding Association

If there is no fridge available to store your expressed milk it can be safely kept at room temperature for 6 to 8 hours.

If you would like to breastfeed your baby directly, try offering them time at the breast or hold them skin-to-skin to see if they will attach and suck.

Look after yourself as well as you can. Do not be afraid to ask for help from others if you need something. You are doing an important job by looking after your baby.

If you are in an evacuation centre and don't feel comfortable expressing milk in front of people, ask if somewhere more private can be found for you. Evacuation centre workers will be happy to help.

If there is a queue for food or other resources, check if there is a fast-track queue for people with young children. If not, see if someone else can queue for you. If people ask what they can do to help you, suggest things that will lighten your load but not separate you from your baby.

Once the emergency has passed, any changes in your baby's behaviour like more frequent feeding, night waking or clinginess will reduce on their own as life becomes more normal.

Concerned about feeding your baby in an emergency?

Call the **National Breastfeeding Helpline** (free and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) or speak to a healthcare worker.



1800mum2mum
Breastfeeding Helpline 1800 686 268

