

## Patient information factsheet

# Breast milk production after the death of a baby

We are so sorry for your loss. We understand that this is an incredibly sad and difficult time. Please know we are here to support you.

This factsheet contains information to help you make decisions regarding your breast milk supply after your baby has died. We understand that deciding what to do with your breast milk can be an emotional and difficult decision. There is no right or wrong way to feel, and no right or wrong decision, only what feels right for you. We are here to help you think through what to do next and will support you with whatever you choose to do. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to your neonatal nurse or a member of our neonatal family care team or midwifery team.

### Will my body produce breast milk?

It is common for your body to begin producing breast milk even after the death of your baby. Breast milk production typically begins around 16 weeks of pregnancy. After birth, hormonal changes send signals to your body to continue or increase your milk supply.

For some people, the experience of producing breast milk after their baby has died can be deeply upsetting. If this is how you feel, you may prefer to stop the production of breast milk as soon as possible (see 'How do I stop producing breast milk?' section below).

For others, continuing to produce or express breast milk (manually remove milk from your breast by hand or a pump) can offer a sense of comfort or purpose during a difficult time. If this is how you feel, please see the 'Can I continue to express breast milk?' section on page 2 for more information.

Your feelings are valid. There is no right or wrong way to respond. Everyone's journey is different, and support is available to help you make the choice that feels right for you.

### How do I stop producing breast milk?

It can take some time for your body to naturally stop producing breast milk. This process (known as lactation suppression) is a gradual process, and it is important to manage it gently and slowly to avoid discomfort and complications, such as:

- breast engorgement (when your breasts become overly full, causing them to feel swollen, firm, and painful)
- blocked breast milk ducts (when the milk-making glands in your breasts become blocked, usually due to inflammation)
- mastitis (when your breast becomes swollen, hot and painful and you feel unwell with flu-like symptoms due to a blocked breast milk duct not being relieved)

If you have any questions or concerns about lactation suppression or any of the complications on page 1, please contact the maternity infant feeding team, neonatal infant feeding team, or your nursing or midwifery team for support.

We have included some guidance and tips below to help minimise any discomfort you may experience when reducing your breast milk supply.

## Expressing

If you want to stop your breast milk supply, you will need to do it gradually. We advise not expressing your breast milk unless your breasts begin to feel full. This helps signal to your body to make less milk, which over time will result in a reduction in your breast milk supply. If your breasts begin to feel full or you experience discomfort, you should express just enough milk to ease any discomfort or pressure but should try **not** to empty your breasts completely. This is because the more milk you remove, the more milk you are likely to make, which can cause additional problems. We recommend hand expressing rather than expressing using a breast pump as it is easier to control the amount of milk you remove from the breast.

## Cold compresses

Apply cold compresses (such as cooling gel breast pads or an ice pack wrapped in a tissue or tea towel) to your breasts to help relieve discomfort.

## Wear a well-supported bra

Make sure your bra fits properly. A good-fitting bra can help to support your breasts and make you feel more comfortable.

## Medication

Your healthcare team may offer you medication to help slow down the production of breast milk. We will discuss this with you in more detail, if appropriate.

For more information about reducing your breast milk supply, please read our 'Suppressing your breast milk supply after giving birth' factsheet (see 'Useful links' section on page 4).

## Can I continue to express breast milk?

Some people find comfort in continuing to express breast milk after the death of their baby. Grief is deeply personal and affects everyone differently. What feels right for one person may not feel right for another.

If you decide that continuing to express is the right choice for you, you can express your breast milk by hand or pump for as long as you wish.

You may also wish to explore the possibility of donating your breast milk to help other babies in need. If you would like more information about donating your breast milk, please read our 'Donating breast milk after a baby dies' factsheet (see 'Useful links' section on page 4).

We recommend freezing any breast milk you have expressed until you are ready to decide what you want to do with the milk. Please note that if you decide to donate your breast milk, it needs to be donated within **two months** of the date it was expressed. We have included more information about what you can do with your breast milk in the next section.

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For more information and advice about continuing to express your breast milk, please speak to your nursing or midwifery team or our neonatal family care team. You can also contact our milk bank for advice using the details at the end of this factsheet.

## What should I do with my expressed breast milk?

There are several options for what you can do with your expressed breast milk.

- **Donate your breast milk** – In some cases, you may be able to donate your breast milk to help other babies in need. To find out more about breast milk donation, please read our 'Donating breast milk after a baby dies' factsheet (see 'Useful links' section on page 4).
- **Create a keepsake** – Some people choose to use a small amount of their breast milk to create a personal memento, such as breast milk jewellery or another meaningful item. You can find more information about companies that offer this service online.
- **Keep a small amount as a keepsake** – Some people find comfort in saving a small container of breast milk as a personal memory or tribute.
- **Ask for support with disposal** – If you prefer not to keep or donate your breast milk, we can dispose of it at the hospital respectfully on your behalf.

For more information about any of the options above, please contact the neonatal family care team or maternity bereavement support team.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Southampton milk bank team

Telephone: **023 8120 6009** (Monday and Wednesday, 7.30am to 5pm and Thursday, 7am to 3pm)

Mobile: **07795 506279** (every day, 7.30am to 3.30pm)

Email: [Milkbank@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:Milkbank@uhs.nhs.uk)

Neonatal family care team

Telephone: **07827 271166** (Monday to Friday)

Email: [Neonatafamilycare@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:Neonatafamilycare@uhs.nhs.uk)

Maternity bereavement support

Telephone: **07392 128352** (Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 8am to 4pm)

Maternity infant feeding team

Telephone: **07786 267584**

If the team are unable to answer your call, please leave a voicemail with your name, number and a short message, and a member of the team will aim to get back to you within 48 hours.

## Useful links

### UHS

Donating breast milk after a baby dies

[www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Donating-breast-milk-after-a-baby-dies-4114-PIL.pdf](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Donating-breast-milk-after-a-baby-dies-4114-PIL.pdf)



Suppressing your breast milk supply after giving birth

[www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Pregnancyandbirth/Suppressing-your-breast-milk-supply-bereavement-3141-PIL.pdf](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Pregnancyandbirth/Suppressing-your-breast-milk-supply-bereavement-3141-PIL.pdf)

Bereavement support after the death of a baby on the neonatal unit

[www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Bereavement-support-after-the-death-of-a-baby-on-the-neonatal-unit-3275-PIL.pdf](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Bereavement-support-after-the-death-of-a-baby-on-the-neonatal-unit-3275-PIL.pdf)

### Sands

A pregnancy and baby loss charity that provides support to anyone affected by pregnancy loss or the death of a baby.

Website: [www.sands.org.uk](http://www.sands.org.uk)

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **PFSH@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **[www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport)**

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**Southampton  
Hospitals  
Charity**

Charity Registration Numbers 1051543

