

The loss of a baby or child is very difficult for any family/whānau. This resource is about managing your milk supply after your loss.

During pregnancy, your breasts start producing milk from as early as 16 weeks. Your body doesn't know that the milk is not needed if your baby passes away.

You may notice colostrum (yellowish liquid) for the first few days after birth. It is unlikely that your breasts will be uncomfortable with this first/early milk. On the third or fourth day after birthing your milk may start to come in, your breasts may become full and uncomfortable. It is up to you to decide how you would like to manage your milk supply.

Choosing what to do with your milk supply

There are a few options for choosing what to do with your milk supply. We encourage you to discuss these with your whānau/family and health care providers.

- **Stopping your milk supply (lactation suppression)**
 - Using the suggestions under “*discomfort from milk production*” will help to slow down and eventually stop your milk supply.
 - Continue to drink water as normal, cutting down fluids will not reduce milk supply.
 - Medication can be given in the first day after birth. Speak to your health care provider to see if this is appropriate for you.
 - If you have been breastfeeding/expressing for some time before the loss of your baby, and you decide to stop, see the “*weaning your milk supply*” section below.
- **Continue to express until you are ready**
 - If you decide to continue expressing after the loss of your baby, try to keep a pattern of expressing each day and see the “*weaning your milk supply*” section below.
- **Donate your breastmilk**
 - You may like to think about donating your breastmilk. Donating milk can be healing for some people. Please contact www.mothersmilknz.org.nz or “Human Milk for Human Babies NZ” on Facebook for more information.
 - You can also email our inpatient lactation consultants WHlactationservice@adhb.govt.nz or NICU and Starship Lactation consultants on lactationconsultantsstarship@adhb.govt.nz
- **Make a memory using your breastmilk**
 - Some people may like to use their breastmilk to make a memory. Some ideas of this is to pour it on a special plant in the garden, use it to make jewellery, or bury it with your baby.

Discomfort from milk production

When your milk comes in after birth, or when you choose to wean (stop) your milk production, you may experience some discomfort from the fullness /engorgement. If you experience this, there are some things that can help:

- Wear a supportive bra if it feels comfortable
- Avoid hot showers or massaging your breasts, as this can increase milk production.



- Apply icepacks to the breast (not the nipple) for swelling and pain for 10 minutes, every 30 min or as needed to reduce pain and swelling.
- Ibuprofen can reduce pain and swelling. Paracetamol can reduce pain. Take as prescribed.
- Sage tea is thought to reduce milk production.
- If your breasts are very full and uncomfortable, you can express a small amount of milk to make yourself comfortable*. To hand express, place your thumb and finger 2-3 cm back from the nipple near the edge of the areola. Push straight back toward your ribs, then press your fingers together, compressing the tissue, then release. Try not to take too much out, just express enough for relief.

**Although you are allowing the release of some milk, this will not increase your milk supply too much. Having full breasts (not emptying the breasts) sends hormonal messages to slow down milk production.*

Weaning your milk supply

If you have already been breastfeeding/expressing and have an established supply, you should not stop expressing suddenly. You may continue to express as you have been and gradually cut down your supply when you're ready. To do this just drop one expression every day or so. This allows your breasts to become full and signals your body to slow down production. Do this gradually at a pace that suits you. You may need to express once every few days before stopping completely.

Grief

If you require further support with your grief, please speak to your lead maternity carer, family, General Practitioner or social worker. These websites may also be useful:

<https://wheturangitia.services.govt.nz/>

www.sands.org.nz

<https://www.babyloss.co.nz/>

SOURCES

AUSTRALIAN BREASTFEEDING ASSOCIATION - WWW.BREASTFEEDING.ASN.AU

EMPTY ARMS BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT "LACTATION AFTER LOSS" PAMPHLET

