

Summary of Results for Research Participants

‘Tips for Mums’: Exploring Lifeblood Milk donors’ experiences of expressing breast milk to create an educational resource for Mums

Thank you for taking part in this research. This research was led by Dr Mel Hyde and Professor Barbara Masser at The University of Queensland in partnership with Australian Red Cross Lifeblood.

Brief background

Some mums have trouble expressing (pumping) breast milk, lack confidence in their ability to express, or don’t have enough practical information to express effectively. These mums often look to other mums, the internet, or social media for help. However, these online and social sources may not always include the views of mums who are skilled at expressing breast milk. Mums who donate to milk banks likely have helpful insights that can be added to these resources to help other mums.

What we did

We surveyed 45 donors to the Lifeblood Milk bank between April 2020 and September 2021 to find out their experiences and tips on expressing and storing breast milk. Donors answered questions about where they found out information about expressing breast milk, what they found challenging and helpful for expressing, how they stored expressed breast milk, and whether they had any tips for other mums about expressing and storing breast milk. We plan to use the results of this research to create an educational resource, “Tips for Mums”, for new donors and mums who want to express breast milk or are experiencing difficulty expressing.

What we found

Reasons and preferences for expressing and storing breast milk

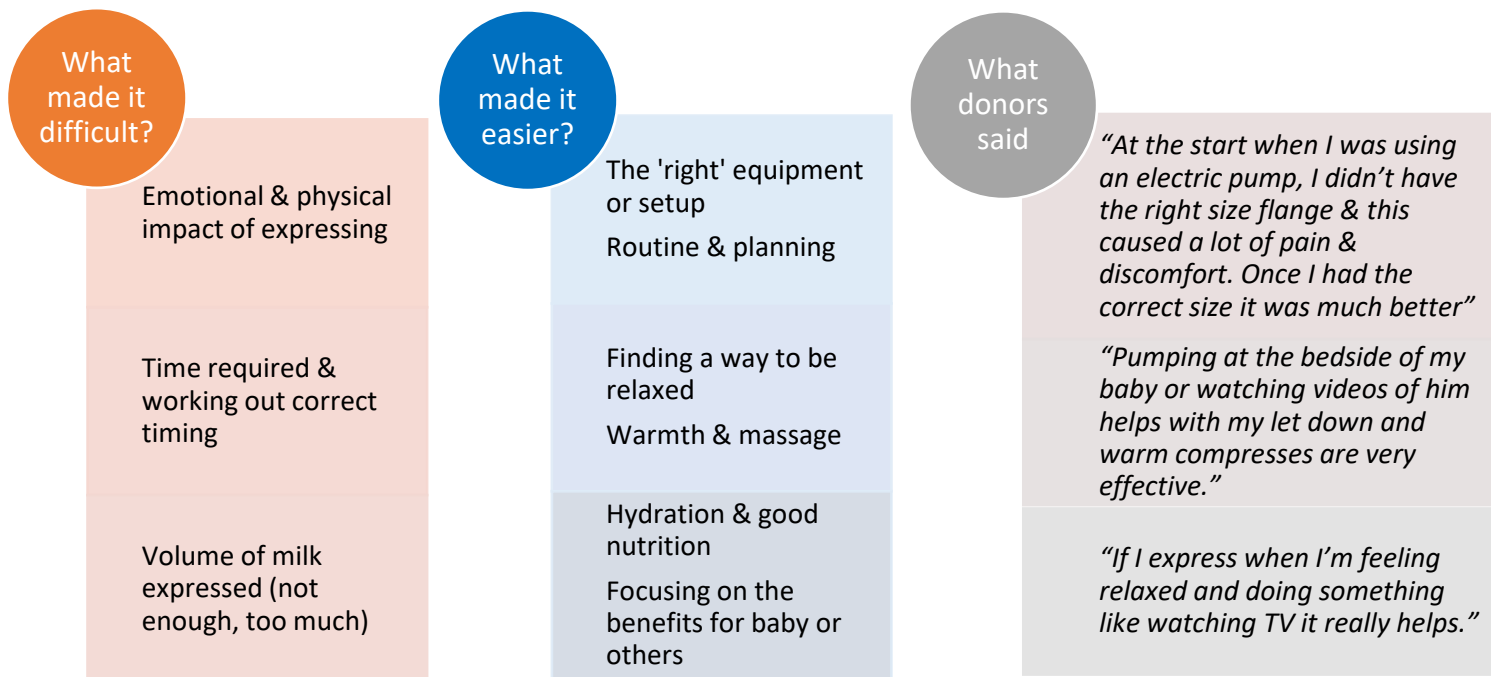
Most donors had expressed breast milk after one (51.1%) or two (26.7%) live births. Over 90% expressed with an electric breast pump and 87% expressed at home. Key reasons why donors started expressing breast milk were mainly to manage their milk over/under supply as well as to address latch problems and/or allow their baby to be fed while they were away or by someone else.

Donors preferred bags rather than bottles or cups to store expressed breast milk, although some donors used bags for freezing and bottles/cups for refrigerating. Bags were viewed as easier to use and defrost, and took up less space during storage. Bags specifically designed for storing breast milk were the most popular.

Information about expressing breast milk

Donors commonly found information from nurses, lactation consultants and educational resources on the internet. They also thought these three information sources were the most helpful. These sources were helpful because they either offered hands-on, personalised advice from experts, or they were easy to access and had a greater variety of information.

Experiences expressing breast milk



Tips for Mums about expressing breast milk

Donors consistently offered five tips for mums who are starting out or struggling with expressing their breast milk.

Choose the 'right' pump for you	<i>"Choose an easy pump without lots of parts to keep track of and assemble."</i> <i>"If you are at the beginning definitely hire a hospital grade pump, get the flange size checked to be perfect for you."</i>
Focus on your baby when pumping	<i>"If you can have some peace and quiet and I watch videos of my baby feeding which makes a letdown happen easily."</i> <i>"Relax, look at photos or videos of your baby if you are away from them while expressing."</i>
Relax	<i>"Be as relaxed as possible. It is amazing the difference being relaxed can make in how much milk you are able to express. Being next to or with your baby definitely helps with that too."</i> <i>"Find a 20min show you can watch on Netflix or something and just switch off- relaxing will help the milk flow."</i>
Take care of yourself by staying hydrated and eating well ¹	<i>"Keep your hydration up. By carrying around a little water bottle in everywhere, I drink more water than I would if I had to get a glass when thirst strikes."</i> <i>"I've found personally and regular eating/healthy snacks, especially when starting out breast feeding and expressing really makes you hungry."</i>
Find the 'right' time for you to pump	<i>"I always pump in the morning when my supply is best."</i> <i>"Start early and get into a routine. Try just frequent short pumps if a longer pump doesn't work for you. First thing in the morning after baby's first feed is a good time."</i> <i>"I do it morning and night. I like to use that time well; by reading to my baby in the morning or watching a movie with my husband at night."²</i>

¹ Note that this tip is based on donor's personal opinions. There is currently not sufficient clinical evidence showing that drinking more water increases milk production. See: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24916640/>

² The hormone, prolactin, that initially kick starts lactation, increases after each feed and overnight. This may contribute to the better supply of a morning. See, [The physiological basis of breastfeeding - Infant and Young Child Feeding - NCBI Bookshelf \(nih.gov\)](#)

Other advice to mums included:

- Create a routine and space for pumping
- Use heat and massage to aid milk flow
- Do what suits them because everyone is different
- Take care of their own wellbeing
- Be patient and persistent with expressing
- Seek help, more information, or support when needed

Tips for Mums about storing expressed breast milk

Advice commonly shared by donors for other mums who are storing expressed breast milk was to:

- Freeze milk in bags specifically designed for storing breast milk so they don't break
- Label the bag before freezing with the date, time, and volume expressed
- Lay bags flat for freezing and once frozen stack upright in a container
- Have a system that ensures older milk is used first (e.g., organise by date)
- Have a dedicated space/equipment for storing expressed milk

Mums want to help / support each other

Donors shared that their experiences were not often easy, especially when they first started pumping. Many shared that encouragement and support were especially helpful for them, and wanted to pass that along to other mothers.

"Thanks for sharing collective experiences. Parents should do more sharing about parenting babies as it is a team sport!"

"It might not be at all what you hoped or expected, but this is still a valid breastfeeding experience!"

"Know you're amazing and to speak to someone if you need help and that's ok."

Next steps

We are working with Lifeblood to create a webpage or flyer based on these tips to be available on the Lifeblood website and Donor Research Network website. We are also writing a blog about the research project findings that will be featured as part of World Day of Human Milk Donation.

Ethical approval

We received ethics approval from the following Human Research Ethics Committees: Australian Red Cross Lifeblood (Hyde 05022020); University of Queensland (2020000219/Hyde 05022020).

Citation

Hyde MK, Masser BM. (2022). Summary of results for research participants - 'Tips for Mums': Exploring Lifeblood Milk donors' experiences of expressing breast milk to create an educational resource for Mums. Donor Research Network, The University of Queensland.