Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Getting Ready for Your Surgery or Procedure While You're Breastfeeding or Lactating

This information will help you get ready for your surgery or procedure while you're breast or chest feeding or lactating (when your body makes milk).

What to do before your surgery or procedure

Ask about your medicines

Talk with your care team about the types of medicine you'll get in the hospital. Most medicine is safe to take while you're breast or chest feeding. But there are some that can affect your breast or chest milk.

If you're taking a medicine that affects your milk, your care team will give you instructions. Different medicines stay in your body for different lengths of time. You may need to throw out your milk until the medicine leaves your body and no longer affects your milk. Or, you may need to store your milk for some time before giving it to your child.

If you have questions, ask your care team. You can also find information through these resources.

Infant Risk Center
www.infantrisk.com
806-352-2519
Infant Risk Center offers information about taking medicine during pregnancy and breast or chest feeding.

LactMed Drug and Lactation Database
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK501922
LactMed gives information about medicine and chemicals that can be passed on to your baby from breast or chest milk.

Talk with a lactation consultant

You may want to talk with an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). A lactation consultant is a health professional who helps parents that are breast or chest feeding or lactating. They can support you around the time of your surgery or procedure.

Pump and store your milk

- If possible, express your milk before you go to the hospital. Expressing your milk means emptying milk from your breast or chest. You can do this by pumping (using a breast pump) or hand expressing (using your hand).
- Store a supply of your milk. This will help make sure your baby can drink your milk even when you're not together.
- Plan ahead if you expect to stay in the hospital for more than 24 hours (1 day). Have a family member or friend bring your pumped or expressed milk home each day.
- To learn more, read *How To Express and Store Your Breast or Chest Milk While You're in the Hospital* (www.mskcc.org/pe/express-store-milk).

Storing your milk at MSK

- Your milk can be stored in an insulated cooler bag with ice packs for up to 24 hours. Keep the ice packs on the milk containers at all times. Open the cooler bag as little as possible to help the milk stay cold.
- Once you bring your milk home, use it right away, store it in the refrigerator, or freeze it.
- If you can't send your milk home each day, you can store it in MSK's human milk refrigerator.

Your milk cannot stay in the MSK human milk refrigerator for longer than 3 days. If you have milk stored for longer than 3 days, have someone take it home. Any milk that's not sent home after 3 days will be thrown away.

You'll need to pour your milk into an MSK storage bottle to store it in an MSK human milk refrigerator. Ask your child's nurse for these storage bottles.

To learn more about how to safely store your milk at home or for travel, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breast-milk-preparation-and-storage/handling-...

What to do on the day of your surgery or procedure

Plan to breast or chest feed, pump, or express right before your surgery or procedure. This will help you keep your milk supply. It also will prevent pain and engorgement. Engorgement is when your breasts or chest overfill with milk and become firm and swollen.

What to bring

- Your own breast pump with its power source.
- All the supplies you need for expressing your milk.
- Milk storage containers.
- A cooler bag with ice packs to store your pumped milk.

A technician will check your breast pump to make sure it's safe to use in the hospital. This is often done at your bedside. Sometimes, they may need to take the pump away for a moment to check it.

Using an MSK pump

Your personal breast pump may stop working or have a problem. If so, you can use one of our portable Medela Symphony® electric breast pumps. Ask your care team for more information. We have pumps at these MSK locations:

- Memorial Hospital (MSK's main hospital)
  1275 York Ave. (between East 67th and East 68th streets)
  New York, NY 10065
- David H. Koch Center for Cancer Care
  530 East 74th St.
  New York, NY 10021
- Josie Robertson Surgery Center
  1133 York Ave.
  New York, NY 10065

Talk with your care team

Talk with your care team if you're breast or chest feeding or lactating. Tell them if you want to continue after your hospital stay. If you do, they'll help you keep your milk supply throughout your care.

What to do after your surgery or procedure

Anesthesia (medicine to make you sleep) doesn't stay in your body for very long. If you have questions about the anesthesia you got, talk with your anesthesiologist (the doctor who gives you anesthesia).

You should plan to start pumping again as soon as you're awake and able. If you need help, ask a member of your care team. You may also want to ask your family or friends for help as you recover from your surgery or procedure.

Plan to pump or express every 3 to 4 hours, or at least as often as your baby feeds. Pumping often will help you keep your milk supply until you're with your baby and able to breast or chest feed again.

If you have questions about the medicine you'll get after your surgery or

procedure, talk with your care team. You can also check the websites or call the number listed under the “What to do before your surgery or procedure” section.

More resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Proper Handling and Storage of Human Milk
www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breast-milk-preparation-and-storage/handling-...
This resource has information about how to safely prepare and store breast or chest milk.

Breastfeeding USA
www.breastfeedingusa.org
This resource has information and support for breast or chest feeding.

International Lactation Consultant Association
www.ilca.org
888-452-2478
You can find an IBCLC near you by searching under the “Find an IBCLC” section.

United States Lactation Consultant Association
www.uslca.org
You can find an IBCLC near you by searching under the “Find an IBCLC” section.

New York Lactation Consultant Association
www.nylca.org
You can find an IBCLC near you in New York State through this website.

New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition
www.breastfeedingnj.org/resources/provider-info
You can find an IBCLC near you in New Jersey through this website.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Getting Ready for Your Surgery or Procedure While You're Breastfeeding or Lactating - Last updated on October 17, 2024
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center