

Narra Nest

Pumping Routines

When setting up a pumping routine, the most important thing to consider is your goal, and how often you will need to express milk to meet that goal. Following a set pumping schedule can be very helpful in maintaining your needed supply, but strict schedules don't always make sense for mamas with little ones. If you are a stay-at-home mom who nurses on demand, a strict schedule may not give you the flexibility to respond to your baby's cues. Maybe a loose routine will be more appropriate. If you're a mama that works outside-of-the-home with a varying work schedule, you'll need to figure out a system that works with that fluctuation. That's why I find it helpful to think about these plans as pumping "routines" instead of "schedules."

Remember - routines are not set in stone, and a million different things will come along to change your baby's routine from day to day - growth spurts, teething, ear infections, travelling, etc. Remain flexible. If it's not working, change it. Be gentle with yourself. This is not about perfection, it's about making things work for you and your family.

So let's set up a routine that will work for you!

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Boosting Supply

When pumping to boost supply, it's important to remember the supply and demand concept. The more often your breasts are emptied, the more often they'll fill back up, and the more milk you'll produce. So the goal in this situation is to empty the breast of milk as often as possible. This is why moms are often advised to nurse "on demand" instead of on a schedule. When you nurse on demand, your baby is in charge of how much and how often they eat. This makes a lot of sense when you consider that babies don't always grow at an even pace. Some days they might be hungrier than others, or simply want to nurse more for comfort. That's ok! In fact, nursing often and on demand is one of the most effective way to build your supply! If you're nursing on demand, you may want to consider writing out a loose routine that gives you the flexibility to respond to your baby's cues.

If baby is doing a good job of emptying your breasts, then you will probably just need to add pumping sessions to your nursing routine. If baby isn't emptying your breasts efficiently, it might be more effective for you to try pumping immediately after each nursing session to ensure your breasts are emptied fully. In any case, it's a good idea to make sure your breasts are fully emptied at least every 3 hours.

Sample Routine:

Baby is not latching well yet, and mama is using a nipple shield. Mama doesn't feel that her breasts are being fully emptied when baby nurses, so she chooses to pump after most feeds (about every 3 hours, depending on how often baby nurses that day) and once during baby's 6 hour stretch of sleep. This is a tough routine, but it's only short term. As her supply improves and baby begins to latch better (hopefully with the help of a breastfeeding professional!), she is able to pump less and less. This mama's routine varies quite a bit from day to day, and she allows for that flexibility. Here's her plan:

7:20am: Nurse, then pump

10:00am: Nurse, then pump

11:15am: Nurse

1:10pm: Nurse, then pump

4:00pm: Nurse then pump

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5:30pm: Nurse

7:20pm: Nurse, then pump

8:00pm - 10:00pm: Baby cluster feeds on and off

10:00pm: Nurse, then pump

1:00am: Pump while baby sleeps

4:05am: Nurse then pump

You can also try a “Power Pumping” schedule to boost your supply. Power pumping is defined nicely by La Leche League, “increase the frequency of pumping times by shortening the interval between pumping times instead of increasing the duration of pumping (e.g., pump three times for 15-20 minutes versus two times for 30 minutes if you're away 8-10 hours). This way you're pumping about the same number of total minutes, but you're stimulating your breasts more frequently, which triggers milk production.” This mimics cluster feeding and the increased stimulation should increase milk supply.

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Pumping to Bottle Feed

If you are pumping to exclusively bottle feed your baby with breast milk, you'll want to set up a routine that mimics baby's supply and demand process as closely as possible. Of course, many pumping mamas are also working full or part-time and that will certainly impact your routine. Keep in mind that a 'perfect routine' is one that works for you and your lifestyle!

Sample Schedule:

Baby is twelve weeks old a nursing well, and mama's supply is good. It's time for her to head back to work full-time. She hopes to pump enough to supply baby with breast milk while he's at daycare 8 hours per day and nurse in the evenings and on the weekend. She's never responded well to pumping, and is a bit concerned that she won't be able to keep up. Baby eats about 10 times per day, about 3 oz per feed. Mama expects baby to need about 3 - 4 feeds each day at daycare, so she'll want to pump about 12 oz per day to keep up. She plans her routine as follows:

6:00am: Pump while baby sleeps (3 oz)

7:00am: Nurse when baby wakes up

8:45am: Nurse when dropping off baby at daycare

10:00am: Pump at work (2 oz)

12:30pm: Pump at work (2 oz)

3:00pm: Pump at work (2 oz)

5:15pm: Nurse

7:30pm: Nurse

9:30pm: Nurse

10:30pm: Pump before bed (3 oz)

11:00pm - 6:00am: Mama and baby cosleep and baby nurses a few times throughout the night

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Occasional Pumping

Some mamas may pump to have a bottle or two on hand for the babysitter, or get a bit of a stash started for an upcoming vacation they're planning. Perhaps they pump to donate extra milk to a local milk bank, or so that dad can give baby a bedtime bottle. Occasional pumping is very common and often easier to fit into our daily routine. Many mamas find that pumping during baby's longest stretch of sleep works the best (our supply is often highest late at night and in early morning). Of course, this will depend on your baby's sleep habits. You might find it's most convenient to fit a pumping session in during naptime, or right before you go to bed at night. For occasional pumping, following a set schedule will be less crucial - just find a time when you can relax for a few moments on a regular basis and go from there!

Sample Schedule:

Baby is six months old and nursing is well established. Mama would like to leave baby with his grandparents to enjoy a date night with her partner from time to time, so she plans to build up a small stash of milk.

7:00am: Nurse when baby wakes up

10:00am: Nurse

1:00pm: Nurse

2:00pm: Pump while baby naps

4:00pm: Nurse

7:00pm: Nurse

9:30pm: Nurse

10:30pm: Pump before bed

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Building a Stash

It's important to consider how much milk baby will actually need need while you're away, and how much you typically pump per session. So how much will baby need? KellyMom.com suggests that babies between one and six months will usually drink 19 - 30 oz (570 - 900 mL) per day. Use this figure as estimate and divide by the number of times your baby usually eats to get an idea of how much he'll need per feeding. KellyMom.com provides [a handy calculator to help you estimate your goal amount](#) for yourself.

It's understandable to be concerned about the amount of milk you will be able to store for your baby in your absence! Having a healthy, realistic perspective can set a mother's mind at ease. You don't need a freezer full of breast milk to leave your baby for the day. You simply need enough. Be kind to yourself, you're doing a wonderful job!