Leaking breasts: What you need to know

Why are my breasts leaking?

When you’re breastfeeding your baby, you may notice your other breast leaking milk. This is perfectly normal and caused by something called the ‘let-down’ reflex (also known as the milk ejection reflex), which works like this: Your baby’s sucking triggers the release of the hormone oxytocin in your body. Oxytocin acts on the muscles surrounding the tiny sacs that store milk in your breasts, making them push out or ‘let down’ your milk.¹ And this reflex doesn’t only happen during breastfeeding. You might be surprised by your breasts leaking or spraying milk when you hear your baby cry – or even when you think about him – at any time of the day or night. Leaking is often heaviest in the first weeks after the birth, because your breasts might be making more milk than your baby needs as you both get used to breastfeeding.²

Triggers for let down and leaking include³

Your baby sucking at the breast
The sound of a baby crying
Leaving a long time between feeds
Having breasts that are full of milk

When will my leaking decrease?

The good news is that by four to six weeks your milk supply usually adjusts to meet your baby’s demand⁴ and leaking may decrease as a result. The exact timings are different for every mum, as some find their supply settles down quickly, while for others it can take a little longer.³

Did you know?

All mums are different and you may leak breast milk a lot, a little, or not at all³

Some mums leak a little colostrum (their early milk) during pregnancy⁵

What can I do?

Fortunately, there are things you can do to manage leaks. While you may not be able to control your body’s normal, natural reflexes, you can certainly lessen their impact! Here are our top three tips to help you feel prepared and confident, whether you’re at home or out and about.

✔ Breastfeed
Breastfeeding your baby frequently, on demand, should help to relieve breast fullness.²

✔ Express
If you’re separated from your baby, use a breast pump to remove milk as often as your baby would usually feed.²

✔ Use nursing pads
Pop these absorbent pads inside your bra to soak up any excess milk discretely. You can get different types to match how much milk you’re leaking. Make sure you keep a supply handy and change them regularly.²

Remember: Your amazing milk is nourishing and protecting your baby

For more on leakage and how your milk supply works, visit medela.com/breastmilkleakage

References