

# MANAGING YOUR MILK PRODUCTION AFTER YOUR BABY HAS DIED SUDDENLY

Managing lactation after losing a baby to SUDI (sudden unexpected death of an infant) can be an extra challenge at a time that is already incredibly difficult.

You may want to stop lactation as soon as possible, or you may take comfort in pumping and donating milk. This article looks at the options you have to manage your lactation after the loss of your baby.

## TO STOP LACTATING

### Express to comfort

The key to stopping milk production is to express just enough milk to stay comfortable and no more (express to comfort). This is best done by hand or with a hand pump. This will avoid severe engorgement (breasts painfully full, tender and swollen with milk) and reduce the risk of inflammation of the breast tissue (mastitis) while also sending a message for the body to make less milk. If you have an electric pump and prefer to use this than express by hand, use it on a low setting and only for as long as it takes to become comfortable. Expressing more than this will prolong the time it takes for you to stop producing milk.

Should you experience red, hot, painful areas on your breasts, or fevers, please contact your health professional as soon as possible!

### Use cold compresses

Cold compresses (e.g. cold packs in a damp cloth or crushed ice in a plastic bag and wrapped in a flannel held against painful areas of the breast for up to twenty minutes at a time can reduce any pain or inflammation. There is some evidence that cabbage leaves may be better than cool gel packs for reducing engorgement.

### Pain Relief

Take pain relief as needed and as recommended by your health care professional. This may include paracetamol

### Wear a soft, supportive bra

A firm, well fitted supportive bra can help comfort levels. Binding or tight bras are no longer recommended

### Some herbs may help reduce milk production

Contact a medical herbalist for guidance on the safe use of herbs for this purpose


### Pharmaceuticals/ prescribed medicines

There is no evidence that pharmaceuticals are any more effective than the measures mentioned above for slowing milk production




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## DONATING MILK



Some people find the idea of offering their milk to other babies to be helpful. If you are interested in pumping and donating human milk and are in Canterbury, you can contact one of the local human milk banks to arrange testing and equipment. It will be helpful to let them know your baby has passed so they can respond appropriately to your specific situation.

- Human Milk Bank (neonatal unit at Chch Women's Hospital):  
<https://www.cdhb.health.nz/health-services/human-milkbank/>
- Rotary Community Breast Milk Bank:  
<https://canterburywestcoast.midwife.org.nz/community/rotary-community-breast-milk-bank/>
- Monique's story of milk donation may be helpful; Freya's Gold: Milk Donation After Loss (Lactation Matters, ILCA):  
<https://lactationmatters.org/2014/03/21/freyas-gold-milk-donation-after-loss/>



As long as pumping continues, milk will continue to be made to replace it. When a decision is made to stop donating milk, it is best to gradually pump less often and for shorter pumping times over a period of a couple of weeks. In this way the breasts will adjust naturally so that the production of breast milk can come to a gradual end without engorgement.

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## OTHER THINGS TO BE MINDFUL OF

- Drink plenty of fluids (reducing fluid intake won't help dry the milk up)
- Get plenty of rest
- Take all the support offered

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## OTHER SUPPORT

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- Your LMC midwife, your Well Child Tamariki Ora provider or your GP
  - SANDS New Zealand: <https://www.sands.org.nz>
  - SIDS New Zealand helpline: 0800 164 455
  - <https://www.healthinfo.org.nz/index.htm?A-Z-health-topics-N.htm>