



Lactation After Loss

The experience of losing a baby is something that no woman or family should ever have to go through. Sometimes your body doesn't immediately recognize your loss and makes milk for a baby that isn't there, typically after 16-18 weeks gestation. This can cause your loss to be not only emotionally excruciating, but sometimes physically painful as well. Unfortunately, lactation after loss is a topic that healthcare providers may neglect to discuss, and many women are sent home lacking important resources to manage their breast milk supply.

Whether you want to suppress your supply as soon as possible or are looking to extend this connection to your baby, do what feels right for you. Everyone grieves in a different way and there is no right or wrong way to manage your lactation.

Stopping Lactation

Unfortunately, there is no magic way to "stop" your body from making milk after the loss of a baby. However, there are several strategies and tips that may help encourage your body to stop lactating sooner and lessen any discomforts. It is important to remember that everyone's body is different and what works for one person may not necessarily work for another. Some strategies that may help include:

- Wear a supportive bra 24 hours a day (sports bras work well)
- Avoid stimulation of the breasts and nipples
- Apply ice packs to the breasts
- Use breast pads to keep the nipples dry
- Use over the counter pain medications
- Cabbage leaves in your bra or cabbage extract on the breasts has been shown to provide relief as well

Engorgement, the feeling of heavy, full breasts, is common after experiencing pregnancy loss. Along with the emotional pain of not being able to nurse your baby, the physical discomforts of engorgement can be unbearable. If this happens, you can hand express a small amount of milk when necessary, keeping in mind that the less often you stimulate your breasts, the faster you will stop producing milk.

For most women, milk production will naturally stop within two weeks of the loss. However, the length of time needed for this process may vary from person to person. It is important to contact your healthcare provider if you experience any signs of infection such as warm, red breasts, fever over 101, body aches and/or flu-like symptoms.

Milk Donation

For some women, donating breast milk after the loss of a baby can be a powerful way to heal. Milk donation can help other mothers and babies in need, while honoring the life of the baby lost. It can be a source of comfort and hope, and a reminder of the precious gift of life. If you are interested in milk donation, the [Human Milk Banking Association of North America](#) is a great place to start.

If you do plan to pump milk for donation, start slowly (around 10 to 15 minutes for each breast) and gradually increase the pumping time to avoid unnecessary pain. Depending on how much milk you produce, you can also extend the time between pumping sessions.

As long as pumping milk from the breast continues, breast milk will continue to be made to replace it. When the 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.

Remember: every woman experiences the grief of losing a baby differently. Take time. Be gentle with yourself. Reach out to the women around you - you're not alone. One in four women experience miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss. Chances are, someone close to you knows what you are going through.

Milk Banks with Drop-Off Locations in Missouri

[Oklahoma Mother's Milk Bank](#)
[The Milk Bank](#) in Indiana



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