

Information for breastfeeding military mothers



DEPLOYMENTS, SCHOOLS, AND TRAININGS

Serving in the military means at some point in your career you will be sent on a deployment, to a school, or out in the field for training. These may range from days to months in length and breastfeeding is not a reason for an exemption from participating. Follow the information in this handout to help you prepare for a successful time away from your baby while keeping your milk supply up.

Preparation

Speaking with your leadership is vital. They need to know your requirements for pumping, such as the amount of time you will need, and a suitable place to pump, ahead of time. They do not have to provide storage of your pumped milk. Let your command know that pumping will be necessary in order to keep from developing mastitis (you can request a note from medical).

In preparation for leaving start pumping well ahead of your date and begin storing extra milk in order to leave a good supply for your baby. Pump as often as possible, especially when you are at home, to build up a good stockpile. A good rule is 25-30 ounces a day for infants 1-6 months old.

For a short-duration FTX of a few days, you should have no trouble leaving enough milk behind. If you will be gone for a long period of time, or in an area where you cannot pump, your baby may need to be supplemented with formula, or donor milk, or you may need to consider weaning. Be sure that you have introduced a bottle and whichever formula you will be using before you leave to be sure that your baby will tolerate it.

Pack your pump, extra parts, electrical adaptors (overseas), cleaning gear, hand sanitizer/wipes, shipping supplies, storage bags, and a blanket (to pump under).

Deployments Overseas

Be prepared to pump during the long flight overseas. Forward operating bases or installations with personnel quarters and medical facilities, should have areas to convert into a pumping station. Speak with the cooks or medical about storing your milk in their freezers while waiting to ship it home. Pump at least six to eight times in 24 hours (1-2 overnight) to maintain your milk supply. Be prepared that your supply may drop. You have the choice to pump and dump which is cheaper, but means your baby at home will require formula. Or you can opt to pump and ship your milk home which can be very expensive.

Shipboard

Shipboard sailors face many challenges such as lack of privacy, limited time to pump, lack of storage space and no way to ship milk home. Enlisted sailors can pump in the berthing lounge areas or medical. Officers may pump in their staterooms. 12-hour Port/Starboard work schedules require at least 4 pumping sessions plus at least 1-2 more at 'night'. GQ and Man Overboard drills mean keeping your pump with you or knowing hand expression. Pumping and dumping is the norm for long at sea periods since storage is at a premium with no way to fly the milk off the ship. Breast pumps must be certified by the ship's Electrical Safety office.

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PERSONAL USE ONLY

Field Training

Finding a suitable place to pump in field conditions can be tricky. You will be living in primitive conditions with little privacy, few places to pump, and possibly no electricity or refrigeration.

- Create a pumping place with a strung-up towel or poncho around your cot or in a corner of the tent, or pump under your shirt or rain poncho. While on the move it is usually easier to just hand express your milk directly onto the ground.
- Pump as often as possible but at least four to six times in 24 hours, with 1 or 2 of those during the night to keep your supply up.
- Ask the cooks or medics for ice if you have a personal cooler to store your milk in or ask if you can store your milk in their freezers for shipment home.
- You may have to pump and dump to maintain your supply if there is no storage option.
- Eat and drink regularly in order to help maintain your milk supply. Do not forgo drinking enough water because you can't relieve yourself in the field due to the conditions or a lack of time. Dehydration can affect your milk supply.
- Do NOT wean abruptly, this can lead to mastitis. Continue to pump or hand express to comfort until your supply regulates down.
- Upon your returning home, frequent nursing and pumping should increase your supply back up to its normal level.
- If you will be wearing heavy gear or packs, be sure that the straps are not pressing into your breast tissue as it may increase the risks of plugged ducts and/or mastitis.
- Wash your hands and your pump parts while in the field, keep some hand sanitizer and/or hand wipes in your uniform.
- Know how to do hand expression before you leave. It's portable, free, and doesn't require electricity. It can save you a lot of heartache in the field.

Breastfeeding while on a field training exercise is doable. However, it will take a lot of perseverance and dedication on your part.

Schools/TDY

Being sent to school/training or on a TDY means you'll need to know how to manage pumping while you are on the road. The good news is that you will have a building with electricity and other amenities.

- Speak with the supervisor or OIC ahead of time about your requirements and work out a pumping schedule and a place to pump before you arrive if possible.

Times and places to pump while attending a school or training can be difficult with short 10-15 min breaks and strict attendance time requirements for passing or certification.

- Pump at every break even if it's only 5-7 min in length.
- Use the Hands-On Pumping method.
- Look for unused classrooms or instructor's lounge.
- Ask if you can pump in the back of the classroom behind a curtain or under a nursing cover.
- Request a mini-fridge or freezer for your quarters so that you can freeze your milk for storage and/or shipment home.

You have a couple of options regarding what to do with your pumped breastmilk when you are sent TDY for a training or school. It all depends on the length of the training and the distance away. If your assignment is short-term and will last only few days, you can pump and dump or store the milk to bring back home. TDYs that last for weeks and months will require that you pump and ship your milk. If you are lucky enough to have an assignment located nearby, you can just go home in the evenings and bring your pumped milk with you, as you would at your regular workplace.

Treat these TDYs like any other training exercise. The key is preparation and a can-do attitude!