

Experiencing the loss of a baby is an incredibly painful and challenging journey. In the midst of grief, you may find yourself facing a physical reminder of your loss and parenthood: lactation. While this can be an emotional and complex experience, it is important to know that you are not alone. Many birthing parents who have experienced infant loss may continue to produce breast milk.

Nest Collaborative aims to provide support and information for parents navigating lactation after loss and offers guidance on managing physical changes, emotional well-being, and available resources to assist you during this unique journey. Remember that every person's experience is different, and it is essential to prioritize self-care and seek professional support when needed.

Grieving the loss

Dealing with the loss of an infant is an incredibly difficult experience.

- Recognize that grieving is an essential part of the healing process; it is ok to feel sadness, anger, guilt, and anxiety.
- Take time to process your emotions and grieve your loss.
- Consult with healthcare professionals and/or support groups for guidance and support while grieving, along with the support of loved ones and friends.
- Engage in self-care activities that promote healing and self-nurturing.

Physical changes

Experiencing the loss of a baby can have significant effects on both your emotional well-being and physical body, including changes in your breasts. Here are some common breast changes that women may experience after infant loss:

MILK PRODUCTION

Even without regular breastfeeding or pumping, your body may start to produce milk. This can vary for each individual and may last for a different duration. Some parents may experience a gradual decrease in milk production over time.

ENGORGEMENT

Your breasts may become engorged with milk as they start to produce milk after the loss. This can cause discomfort, swelling, and a feeling of fullness.

LEAKAGE

You may experience leaking of breast milk, especially when your breasts are full or stimulated. It is advisable to wear nursing pads or absorbent breast pads to manage any leakage.

Management of breast milk

Deciding what to do with your breast milk after the loss of an infant is a deeply personal decision. Here are a few options you might consider:

DONATION

Some choose to donate breast milk to milk banks or to other families in need. Milk banks have specific guidelines and requirements for donated milk, so it's important to reach out to them for more information.

- Human Milk Banking Association of North America - Website: [hmbana.org](https://www.hmbana.org)
- Regional Milk Banks - Website: <https://www.hmbana.org/find-a-milk-bank/>

INFORMAL SHARING

You could consider sharing your breast milk with someone you know who may have a need for it. It is important to discuss this option with the recipient and ensure that they are aware of the circumstances and any factors that may affect the health and wellbeing of the recipient.

- Eats on Feets - Website: eatsonfeets.org
- Human Milk for Human Babies (Global) - Website: facebook.com/hm4hb
- MilkShare - Website: milkshare.forumotion.com

MEMORIALIZING

Some parents choose to keep a small amount of breast milk as a way to honor and remember their baby. This could involve freezing a portion of the milk or creating a special keepsake.

LACTATION SUPPRESSION

After the loss of an infant, some parents face the difficult task of suppressing lactation, or stopping milk production. This process can be emotional and physically challenging, but with time and self-care, it is possible to gradually decrease milk production.

References:

Milk Donation and Sharing - La Leche League International. (2021, August 6). La Leche League International. <https://lila.org/breastfeeding-info/milk-donation/>
Milk Sharing: Formal and Informal. (2018, January 23). Breastfeeding USA. <https://breastfeedingusa.org/content/article/milk-sharing-formal-and-informal>
Ward, G., Adair, P., Doherty, N., & McCormack, D. (2023). Bereaved mothers' experience of expressing and donating breast milk: An interpretative phenomenological study. *Maternal and Child Nutrition*, 19(3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.13473>

Ultimately, the decision is yours, and it is important to do what feels right for you and aligns with your grieving process. Here at Nest Collaborative we are here to support you in that journey and offer guidance on the best plan of care for you.

You can schedule your appointment with a Nest Collaborative IBCLC to discuss lactation after loss by going to our website www.nestcollaborative.com or by calling (888) 598-1554.

