



## **Breast Pumps 101**

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As you look forward to your baby's arrival, you are probably looking at lists of essential items to have ready. One of the more mystifying things on your list may be a breast pump, especially if this is your first baby. Perhaps your friend or relative has offered to give you their old pump, or buy you one as a gift. How do you make the choice?

There are **three general categories** of breast pump. Your personal situation will decide the appropriate pump.

**Hospital-grade pumps** are designed to be very durable, lasting for many years and used by many people. Although no pump is exactly like a baby, these will most closely resemble the suckling of a baby. They are all double (pumping both breasts at once), fully-automatic, electric pumps. They are considered closed-systems, incorporating a filter or other barrier so that no pathogens may enter the motor housing. Each person has their own **kit**, which includes the tubing, the filter/barrier, and the parts that touch the skin or milk. Commonly available brands of hospital-grade pumps in Austin include Ameda, Hygeia and Medela. There are several models within each brand, each with their own special features. Rental prices for the motor range from \$55 - \$80 per month depending on the model. Rental stations will also have the kit available for purchase; or you may be given one if you have a hospital birth.

Hospital-grade pumps can also be purchased by special order, and range in price from about \$700 - \$2000. They can also be found used, but as a buyer, beware. Consider getting the serial number and calling the manufacturer to be sure the particular pump isn't considered "missing" from a rental station.

You will need a hospital-grade pump to establish and protect your milk supply:

- If you will be separated from your baby for any length of time, or your baby is not nursing well, before breastfeeding is well established.
- If your baby has a condition such as cleft-palate that prevents effective breastfeeding.
- If you choose to exclusively pump your milk rather than feed the baby directly at the breast.

**Professional-grade pumps** are also double, electric, fully-automatic pumps. They are designed to be used by someone with a well-established milk supply, but who will be separated from their baby for a few feedings each day. Some of these pumps are open-systems (notably the Medela Pump In Style) and do not have the protective barrier to prevent pathogens from entering the motor. Since the motor cannot be fully sanitized, these are considered single-user pumps and should not be used by more than one person. Some, such as the Spectra S1/S2, Ameda Mya Pro, Hygeia EnJoye and some Medela models (not Pump In Style) do have a barrier, commonly called a back-flow protector, so mold or pathogens in the motor are less of an issue.

Be aware that professional-grade pump motors have a shorter lifespan than hospital-grade pumps and may lose effectiveness or simply burn-out over time. Most have a 1-2 year manufacturer's warranty on the motor but typically last longer.

Replacement parts for the kit are readily available. The Spectra S1/S2, Hygeia Enjoye, Ameda Mya, and Medela Pump In Style, Freestyle, Sonata are all professional-grade pumps and range in price from about \$160 - \$400. Some have features such as rechargeable batteries and timers. Many insurance plans include benefits for a professional grade pump.

Another interesting option to consider is a wearable pump such as the Willow or Elvie. They have two separate motors, one for each breast. The storage container is within the unit. Willow uses proprietary bags or reusable containers; Elvie has plastic bottles. There is an app that tracks the amount of milk you have collected, albeit with imperfect accuracy. They are more expensive than other professional grade pumps. They are relatively new on the market; so effectiveness and durability are unknown at this time. Your breast size and shape may affect how well these pumps will work for you.

**Occasional-use pumps** are designed for a person who will be with their baby for almost all feedings, but may want to give a bottle on occasion, generally less than once per day. They can be manual or electric. Many only pump one breast at a time. They are not designed to withstand heavy use, so will have a shorter warranty period. Prices range from \$10 - \$200.

A silicone pump such as the Haakaa is often used to collect drip milk from one breast while the baby nurses from the other. These are often called passive pumps or milk collectors, but they can generate considerable suction if you squeeze them too hard.

## How to Decide

If you are planning to stay at home with your baby, you may not need a pump at all! Many breastfeeding people never use one. They manage separations from their baby between feedings or take the baby with them. Breastfed babies are very portable.

If you know you will have extended separation from your baby in the future, such as going back to work, you will want at least a professional-grade pump. However, you may want to put off the purchase until a couple weeks after your baby is born. If you educate yourself and do what's necessary to get breastfeeding off to a good start, everything will most likely go smoothly. But there is always the chance that you will need a hospital-grade pump for a few weeks until breastfeeding is well established. With that in mind, investing in a professional-grade pump before the birth can be a bit of a gamble. If you expect it to do the job of a hospital-grade pump you could be gambling with your milk supply. If you just feel more comfortable having the pump before the birth, go ahead and get it. But allow yourself to rent a hospital-grade pump for a short time if it turns out to be necessary. You will be able to rely on your purchased pump eventually.

If you have a history of low milk supply with previous babies, or you know that you or your baby have a condition that will prevent effective feeding at the breast, plan to have a

hospital-grade pump available immediately after the birth. That way you can start pumping within hours of the birth to establish a copious milk supply right from the start.

Continue to research the pumps available to you, and make your selection based on your own situation. But most of all, educate yourself about the value of breastfeeding and how to make it work best for you and your baby.

### **Breastshield sizing**

The breastshield is the part of the pump kit that touches your breast. It looks like a funnel and comes in varying widths of the tunnel portion of the funnel. Most pumps come with a standard 24mm and possibly a 27mm or 28mm. You can purchase both smaller and larger sizes made by the manufacturer or other companies.

The proper size is based on the width of the nipple, not including the areola. Breast size is irrelevant. You want your nipple to move freely within the tunnel without rubbing with only a little space to spare. Your nipple may swell a bit when pumping. You can measure the width of your nipple and add 2-3mm as a starting place. But you really can't determine the proper fit without trying different sizes. The most important consideration is that it is comfortable and empties your breast well.