

# Breastfeeding and Jewish Law Part I

*This is a general outline of the laws of breastfeeding. A woman should consult her own Rav for any clarifications.*

**Compiled by Rabbi Yitzchok Zirkind י"ע**<sup>1</sup>

**Edited by Rabbi Berel Bell שיחי'**

*Courtesy of N'shei Chabad Newsletter*

## Expressing Milk on Shabbos and Yom Tov:<sup>2</sup>

Expressing milk into a bottle or container on Shabbos, whether done by hand<sup>3</sup> or with a pump<sup>4</sup>, is a Biblical prohibition. If the milk goes directly to waste ( for example, if it was expressed directly into the sink), it is a Rabbinic prohibition. Under some circumstances, the Sages did not apply this Rabbinic prohibition.

Please note that breastmilk is considered a baby's natural food and a mother should make every effort to nurse her baby. If the laws written below impinge on this, she should consult a Rav rather than just stop nursing, since this is just a general guide. (It is obvious, for example, that depending on what the the baby's doctor says, the laws of Shabbos and Yom Tov may be set aside to keep the baby nursing.)

1. A woman who is very uncomfortable, because she is engorged, may express her excess milk where it will go to waste<sup>5</sup>, such as into the sink, onto the ground, or even into a container into which one first placed liquid soap<sup>6</sup>. Although expressing milk is generally forbidden on Shabbos, our Sages have ruled leniently if a woman is in pain, and if the expressed milk is not usable.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks are given to the Rabbanim who helped prepare these laws for publication, and also added from sources that were not available to the author.

<sup>2</sup> In general, the restrictions on Shabbos apply to Yom Tov as well. In cases of extreme difficulty, consult a Rav.

<sup>3</sup> S"A ADMH"Z 328:41. The prohibition is *Mefarek* (separating a liquid from its source – see S"AAD-MH"Z 305:28), which is a *toldah* of *Dosh*.

<sup>4</sup> *Shut Shevet Halevi* 6:30.

<sup>5</sup> S"A ADMH"Z 330:9.

<sup>6</sup> See *Piskei Teshuvos*, 330, footnote 32. *Toras HaYoldes* 41:3. There should be enough soap that the mixture is still inedible at the end of expressing.

<sup>7</sup> *Shmiras Shabbos K'Hilchoso* 36:20. If these options cannot be used, ask a Rav regarding expressing small amounts. See sources quoted in footnote 10c, below.

Similarly, where it will go to waste, a mother may express a bit of milk to interest a passive baby in nursing. S"A ADMH"Z 328:41, *Badei Hashulchan* 138 (30), *Be'er Moshe*, quoted in *Toras HaYoldes*, ch. 41 (11). If this will not work, see *Badei Hashulchan* 138 (30), *Mishna Berura* 328:112 and *Shaar Hatziun* 328:81.

2. A nursing baby is considered by *halacha* to need his mother's milk.<sup>8</sup> If the baby cannot nurse normally or is hospitalized:
  - a. The mother should try to express enough milk in advance during the week so that she does not need to express milk on Shabbos or Yom Tov.
  - b. If this is not possible, but there is a non-Jew available (e.g. a nurse, if the mother is still in the hospital), the non-Jew may do the expressing.<sup>9</sup>
  - c. If neither a) nor b) is possible, a Rav should be consulted regarding under what conditions it is permissible to express milk that will be fed to the baby.<sup>10</sup>

3. Breast milk that is expressed on Shabbos or Yom Tov is subject to the restrictions of *muktzeh*. Therefore, whether the milk is being used or whether it is being discarded, it should be moved as little as possible.<sup>11</sup>

## Mothercare on Shabbos and Yom Tov:

4. In the case of inflamed nipples that must be treated on Shabbos or Yom Tov, remedial cream should be applied to cloth (or gauze) beforehand. A woman may then apply the cloth on Shabbos.<sup>12</sup> (They should be properly protected from possible contamination.) If she forgot to prepare it before Shabbos, or she didn't realize before Shabbos that she would need it on Shabbos, she can squeeze from a tube directly onto herself without smearing or rubbing it in any way, and just leave it there so that it will become spread out by itself. A woman should avoid taking the cream out of a container with her finger, since it is inevitable that she will smear it a bit<sup>13</sup>. A mother is also permitted, when necessary, to take medicine or receive injections to treat breast inflammation.<sup>14</sup>

5. Nursing collection cups (i.e. specially designed cup-like devices that are placed over the nipples to collect droplets of milk that leak between feedings) may be used only by mothers whose supply of milk is otherwise inadequate for their infants. The cups do not draw out the milk

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<sup>8</sup> Yevomos 114a. *Shmiras Shabbas K'Hilchoso* 36 (62); 37 (2). *Shulchan Shlomo (Refuah)* 3:131-132.

<sup>9</sup> *Toras HaYoldes* 41:2:1. *Ashrei Yoladto* 9:64:3.

<sup>10</sup> Among the factors to be considered: a) whether there are suitable alternatives (see *Shabbos K'Halacha*, Vol. 3, 19:8-11, *biurim* 6); b) using a *shinui* (ibid. 19:8); c) whether to express in small amounts, and if so, how small (see *Badei HaShulchan* 138 [30], *Shiurei Torah* ch. 3, Ois 17; *Shabbos K'Halacha*, Vol. 3, 19, *biurim* 5, however, disagrees); d) in which manner one may use a pump, manual or electric (ibid. 9:13-14).

<sup>11</sup> S"A ADMH"Z 305:32. *Toras HaYoldes*, Chapter 41 (2). See *Shabbos K'Halacha*, Vol. 3, 19:15-19.

<sup>12</sup> *Shmiras Shabbas K'Hilchoso* 36:22.

<sup>13</sup> *Piskei Hilchos Shabbos* Vol. 1, 5:5. The 39 *Melochos* page 923.

<sup>14</sup> *Shmiras Shabbas K'Hilchoso* 36:22

(as a pump would), but merely serve to collect otherwise lost milk<sup>15</sup>. However, she may not wear them outside on Shabbos.

6. Nursing pads are sometimes worn:

- a. for the comfort of the woman's body (to keep it dry and clean)
- b. to keep her garments/undergarments clean.

If they are worn solely to keep the clothing clean, they may not be worn outside on Shabbos. If they are also worn to protect her body from discomfort, and they will remain firmly in place, they may be worn outside on Shabbos.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The 39 *Melochos*, page 357, and footnote 152a.

<sup>16</sup> *S"A ADMH"Z* 303:18. See also *Ashrei Yoladto* 9:67.

# Breastfeeding and Jewish Law Part II

*This is a general outline of the laws of breastfeeding. A woman should consult her own Rav for any clarifications.*

Compiled by Rabbi Yitzchok Zirkind ע"ה<sup>17</sup>

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## Yom Kippur<sup>18</sup>:

9. Nursing mothers are obligated to fast on Yom Kippur. If a nursing mother's baby depends totally on mother's milk for nourishment, and she will not have enough milk for him if she doesn't drink, she must consult a Rav for direction. Most nursing mothers find that if they drink a lot before the fast, they are able to fast and nurse, even if this is difficult.
10. If a nursing mother feels that attending shul will cause weakness, making it difficult for her to fast, she should not expend her energy by going to shul. It is best for her to stay at home and fast rather than go to shul and feel it necessary to drink.
11. Women who have given birth within one week of Yom Kippur must consult a Rav concerning their obligations on Yom Kippur.

## Tishah B'Av and Other Fast Days:

12. Nursing mothers are obligated to fast on Tisha B'Av. A woman who has given birth within a month of Tishah B'Av, and any nursing mother who finds it difficult to fast, should consult a Rav for instructions<sup>19</sup>.
13. Nursing mothers are not obligated to fast on the minor fast days: the fast of *Gedaliah*, the tenth of *Tevet*, the fast of Esther<sup>20</sup>, and the seventeenth of *Tammuz*, even if they suffer no discomfort. A nursing mother who wishes to fast on minor fast days is permitted to do so as long as she is not within a month of giving birth. There is, however, no necessity to try to fast<sup>21</sup>. A nursing mother who is weak, or a mother who grows weak from fasting, is

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<sup>17</sup> Thanks are given to the Rabbanim who helped prepare these laws for publication, and also added from sources that were not available to the author.

<sup>18</sup> Based on *Shmiras Shabboa Kihilchoso*.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> According to *Nishmas Avrohom O"C* 686:1 *Taanis Esther* is more lenient than other fast days.

<sup>21</sup> This is the way the majority of *Poskim* rule today, based on the distinction of the *Yeshuas Yaakov* in the words of the *Ramah* 686:2 (see *Mishna Brura* 686 (4)). While many *Poskim* don't agree with this distinction and so it seems is the opinion of *S"A ADMH"Z* 470:5 with regard to where the custom is for the mother to fast *Erev Pesach Taanis B'chorim* for her son who is a *B'chor* and the father is also a *B'chor*]. Another factor

not permitted to do so.

14. Nursing mothers who are not fasting should not eat or drink for enjoyment, but should eat/drink only enough to sustain themselves and their babies<sup>22</sup>.

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taken into consideration is the fact that we are considered a weak generation. *Oruch Hashulchan* 554:7.  
According to the *Yechaveh Daas* Vol. 1 # 35 even if she wishes to fast, she should not be allowed to fast.

<sup>22</sup> *S" A* 554:5.

## How Long Should a Woman Nurse her Baby?

15. A healthy child may continue nursing until he/she is four years old. A weaker child may continue nursing until age five<sup>23</sup>.
16. A child over the age of two<sup>24</sup>, who has weaned himself for over seventy-two hours, should not resume nursing unless it is necessary for his well-being. If, however, the child was forced to stop nursing, due to an illness, he/she may resume nursing again, even after many days have passed. A child under the age of two may resume nursing even if he weaned himself for a month or more, but he should not resume nursing after the age of two, unless it is necessary for his well-being<sup>25</sup>.
17. Interrupting the nursing of her son for 24 hours and starting to nurse again may have a negative effect on the child<sup>26</sup>. To correct this, she should first express some milk (from both sides) and discard it. Only after this is done, may she resume nursing<sup>27</sup>.
18. One is not permitted to wean the child before 24 months, if not due to pregnancy, or other need<sup>28</sup>. Poskim encourage a woman to breastfeed her baby until the age of 18-24 months if she can. She may wean her baby earlier, due to pregnancy, or another need.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid Y”D 81:7. *Shach s”k* 19.

<sup>24</sup> In a leap year it would be 25 months, however if he stopped for 72 hours in the 25<sup>th</sup> month, one should be *Machmir* (stringent) and consider it as though it is after 2 years, *Kaf Hachayim* Y”D 81 ois 62.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, in which case he must discontinue once it is no longer necessary for his health (*Shach s”k* 22).

<sup>26</sup> *Sefer Zchira*

<sup>27</sup> *Kaf Hachayim* Y”D 116 ois 195.

<sup>28</sup> *Pischei Tshuva* Y”D 81 s”k 16, see also *Sdei Chemed Asifas Dinim Ma’areches Hei* ois 42, this is also brought in the name of the *Ariza”l* (*Ben Ish Chai* 2 *Parshas Emor* # 13). However, some point out that according to the Tzemach Tzedek, *Even Hoezer* end of *Simon* 45, that the prohibition today is only prior to 18 months.

## General Laws of Breastfeeding:

19. Breast milk is kosher<sup>29</sup> and pareve, and may be drunk by another individual who is not nursing. This individual may only drink the milk from a cup.
20. Although pareve food normally may be warmed in a meat pot, breast milk should not be, lest an observer mistake it for cow's milk<sup>30</sup>. If, in error, it was cooked with meat, the food remains kosher.
21. A mother may study Torah and recite any blessing or prayer<sup>31</sup>, with the exception of *Shemoneh Esrei*<sup>32</sup>, while she is nursing<sup>33</sup>.
22. A husband may study Torah and recite blessings and prayers in a room in which his wife is nursing, but only if no parts of her body which are normally covered are exposed<sup>34</sup>. If she is not completely covered, he may still study Torah and recite blessings as long as his entire body is turned away from his wife<sup>35</sup>.
23. Women may study Torah and recite blessings or prayers in a room where a mother is nursing, even if she is not completely covered<sup>36</sup>.
24. If the mother does not have any milk, and the only available option is milk from a non-Jewess, one should first turn to a milk bank that offers milk from a *frum* (Torah observant) woman. If this is not available, it is preferable (when not posing a medical risk), to use kosher formula. If even this option is not available, then one may take milk from a non-Jewess<sup>37</sup>.
25. One is not permitted to give a child to a non-Jewish woman to be nursed in the house of the non-Jewess<sup>38</sup>; However, in the house of a Jew it is permitted, as long as she is checked upon. At night<sup>39</sup>, someone must be there constantly<sup>40</sup>. Even so, this is only permitted when absolutely no other option exists, and a Rav should be consulted.

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<sup>29</sup> *S" A Y" D* 81:7.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* 87:4.

<sup>31</sup> *S" A ADMH" Z* 74:5.

<sup>32</sup> One is not permitted to hold a child during *Shmoneh Esrei*, *S" A ADMH" Z* 96:1.

<sup>33</sup> However, she may not say a *Bracha* etc. without washing her hands if she touched her breasts, as they are considered "*m'komos hamchusim*", *Shut Lvushei Mordechai Mhd"t Siman* 21. Likewise if she touched areas of the baby that are normally covered. If one cleans their hands with a moist wipe, or wets them, this suffices.

<sup>34</sup> *S" A ADMH" Z* 75:1

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid* 75:1,9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* 75:2.

<sup>37</sup> *S" A Y" D* 81:7

<sup>38</sup> Even when there is no choice and it must be nursed by a non Jewess.

<sup>39</sup> From when people go to sleep, *Tos. D" H Ovedes A" Z* 26a.

<sup>40</sup> *S" A Y" D* 154:1.

26. A Jewish woman is not allowed to nurse the child of a non-Jew, unless it is needed to relieve the pain of engorgement<sup>41</sup>.
27. Upon awakening during the night to nurse<sup>42</sup>, a woman should wash *negel vasser*, however she need not say *Birchos Hashacher*<sup>43</sup>. If one is careful not to touch the mouth of the baby, or any other area which one may not touch prior to washing *negel vasser* (see footnote 40), and they are remaining in bed, there is no need to wash *negel vasser*.
28. If drinking water only in order to assist with the milk production, according to *Halacha* there is no need to make *Bracha*. However, according to some *poskim*, it is advisable to add a little bit of sugar to the water, so that she can then make a *Bracha*.
29. If the child can recite a *Bracha*, the child should recite the *Bracha* before nursing (the breasts should be covered at the time of the *Bracha*)
30. When a woman begins to nurse her baby boy she should begin with the left breast<sup>44</sup>. The reason is so that he begins his first meal closer to the heart which is the resting place of Bina<sup>45</sup>. It therefore it makes no difference if she is a right-handed or left-handed person<sup>46</sup>. This is limited to a boy (who is required to learn Torah) and does not apply to a girl<sup>47</sup>. One should maintain this practice for every son, and not just the first son<sup>48</sup>.
31. A woman who, r'l, had children who died<sup>49</sup> as a result of her milk being toxic, should consult with a Rav before continuing to nurse<sup>50</sup> any future children.
32. A woman should guard herself against anger, as this harms the milk<sup>51</sup>. When it is necessary to give the child to another Jewess to nurse she should try to find someone that is good-natured and not an angry person<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid 154:2. The *Miri* says this is limited to *Goyim* that are *Ovdei A"Z* not general *Goyim*.

<sup>42</sup> Likewise, when changing a diaper, as she might touch those places that are a *Sakana* to touch before *negel vasser* (which are: mouth, nose ears, eyes, rectum and male organ), however when getting up to give the child a pacifier, or to cover the baby (and she will not be walking 4 *Amos*) it is enough to be careful not to touch those areas. Giving a bottle, although not touching the food directly, also requires *negel vasser* according to *Poskim*. (Sephardic women should take note of the view of the *Ben Ish Chai* that one who awakens during the night, even for a short time, should wash to remove ruach ra, even if no orifices are touched).

<sup>43</sup> As this is not considered *Hamashkim Lokum* (waking up early for the day).

<sup>44</sup> *Tzavoas R"Y Hachasid ois 55*.

<sup>45</sup> *Shu"t Ginzei Yosef # 26 ois 17*.

<sup>46</sup> *Kuntres Ish Itar ois 86*.

<sup>47</sup> *Shu"t Ginzei Yosef ibid*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid, Shivim Tmorim ois 69*.

<sup>49</sup> Two children.

<sup>50</sup> *Kaf Hachayim Y"D 116 ois 136*, he adds that the same applies if the milk was the source of other disabilities.

<sup>51</sup> *Sefer Zchira* brought in *Kaf Hachayim Y"D 116 ois 147*.

<sup>52</sup> Brought in *Sdei Chemed Asifas Dinim Mareches Hei ois 42*, from the *Tzeidah Laderech*.



33. A woman should not walk on a foul item and even more so on sewer water (e.g. *negel vasser*)<sup>53</sup>.
34. A woman should not utter a curse, because this is a danger to the child<sup>54</sup>.
35. A woman should not walk around with her breasts exposed, as this harms the milk. Likewise, she should not nurse in front of men<sup>55</sup>.
36. If a woman experienced a fright, she should not nurse until she rests. After the fright has passed, she should express some milk, and then she may nurse<sup>56</sup>. On Shabbat she is permitted to express the milk where it will go to waste<sup>57</sup>.
37. A woman should not nurse after marital relations<sup>58</sup> for 36 minutes<sup>59</sup>. If the child is crying 18 minutes are sufficient. If the child is weak and crying, then 9 minutes are enough<sup>60</sup>. If even that won't help, she may nurse as needed. Poskim emphasize, from this halacha, how important it is to avoid allowing the child to cry, while busy with other chores.
38. Once the infant recognizes the one who is nursing him/her, one should not change nursers<sup>61</sup>.
39. A nursing woman is not permitted to remarry before 24 months after childbirth<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> *Sefer Zchira, Kaf Hachayim* ibid.

<sup>54</sup> *Sefer Zchira*.

<sup>55</sup> *Sefer Zchira, Kaf Hachayim* ibid.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid ois* 148.

<sup>57</sup> *Badei Hashulchan* ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Note *Oruch* and *Tos. Yuma* 77b with regard to nursing after going to the bathroom and bathing.

<sup>59</sup> *MG"A* end of *Siman* 240.

<sup>60</sup> *Taharas Yisroel* 240:16.

<sup>61</sup> See *S"A Even Hoezer* 82:5, *Sefer Chasidim* 189, as to what age it is, see *Ksubos* 60a,

<sup>62</sup> See *Even Hoezer* 13 for the many details.

### Food While Breastfeeding:

40. According to some *Poskim*, nursing women, who are in need of nutrients contained in milk products, are permitted to eat dairy foods one hour after eating meat, when necessary, providing that she cleans her teeth and rinses her mouth between the two dishes<sup>63</sup>.
41. A nursing mother whose milk is not good for the child unless she eats meat, may eat even beef in the first 8 days of *Av* (if chicken will not suffice)<sup>64</sup>.
42. Likewise if the one who nurses the baby, even if Jewish, ate prohibited foods<sup>65</sup> (even when permitted for medical reasons<sup>66</sup>) she should not nurse the baby<sup>67</sup> for one day<sup>68</sup>. The baby should rather be nursed by someone else<sup>69</sup> as this will harm him, as above.
43. A nursing woman should be careful to eat foods that are good for the milk<sup>70</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Based on *Chokhmah Adam* 40:13, *Oruch Hashulchan Y"D* 89:7.

<sup>64</sup> *Mishna Brura* 551 s"k 64. There is no prohibition to buy meat during these days, *Igros Moshe O"C* Vol. 4 # 112 ois 3.

<sup>65</sup> This includes *Basar B'chalav* and time sensitive *Issurim* i.e. *Chometz on Pesach*.

<sup>66</sup> *S"A Y"D* 81:7 *Shach s"k* 25 T"Z s"k 12. See *Darkei Teshuva* ibid s"k 91.

<sup>67</sup> **Ramo Y"D** 81:7.

<sup>68</sup> The *Pri Megadim* ibid *S"D s"k* 25 writes not to nurse for "those days", which refers to several days of the medication being taken, if it is only taken for one day, one should avoid nursing for one day.

<sup>69</sup> *Taz* and *Shach Pri Megadim S"D s"k* 25 ibid.

<sup>70</sup> See *Even Hoezer* 80:11, where it mentions **wine**.

## **Nidah<sup>71</sup> and Breastfeeding:**

44. For 24<sup>72</sup> months after childbirth<sup>73</sup>, even if the baby died, r'l, or she stopped nursing, a woman is presumed to have ceased menstruating (*mesulekes damim*). Therefore, the laws of *vestos* are a little different than for a non-nursing woman.
45. If a woman resumes menstruation within the first 24 months after childbirth (whether she is breastfeeding or not), all of the laws of the calendar resume with the first cycle, no matter how soon, or delayed, after birth this occurs. During this time she is required to keep all the onos as for one with no fixed cycle: *veses hachodesh*, *onah beinonis* and all *haflagah* onos created by the cycles occurring at this time. This is the case even if she had an established, fixed cycle when she conceived. For the first 24 months she does not keep the established cycle, nor can she establish any regular, fixed cycle until the first 24 months are completed.
46. When she menstruates even once, after her nursing period is over, she reverts to observing her original *veses* (as it was before her pregnancy).
47. A nursing woman need not examine herself before or after relations. Even if she has menstruated, in which case the laws of *vestos* apply, (as above, para 45), one can be lenient in this respect (i.e. the examination before and after relations).
48. There may be certain *halachic* leniencies for a nursing mother. Therefore, it is important to notify the Rav that she is nursing when asking a *Shaila* concerning stains and the like.

*Harav Yitzchok Zirkind of Crown Heights was a well known, highly respected and deeply beloved talmid chacham with broad and deep knowledge in Torah, Chassidus and especially halachah. For many years he assisted rabbis in answering questions and in dinei Torah. He was known for the outstanding sensitivity and compassion with which he would deal with difficult situations. Rabbi Zirkind also applied his knowledge and compassion to the chinuch of children. During Tzivos Hashem's annual chidon, he would regularly sit as a judge, quizzing the youthful contestants in various subjects. He passed away suddenly on the 18th of Adar, 5772. Yehi zichro boruch. •*

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<sup>71</sup> Taken from Kitzur Dinei Tahara except where noted. NOTE this is very general.

<sup>72</sup> Even in the case of a leap year, S"A ADMH"Z Y"D 184 s"k 24.

<sup>73</sup> In case of C section one should consult a Rav (Machasheves Hatahara 24:83).