

I regret stopping breastfeeding. How do I start again?

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Many women find breastfeeding [difficult](#) and stop before they planned. Some women are relieved to stop. But others regret it.

If you regret stopping, you may be able to give it another go, even if you no longer have any [milk](#). This may be possible even if it's been weeks or months since you last breastfed.

Why? From COVID-19 to sick babies

Women want to start breastfeeding again for a variety of reasons. Some [babies](#) don't do well on infant formula. Others become sick and their mothers want to give them breastmilk to help them recover.

If a mother found breastfeeding challenging the first time around, a change in circumstance, a little more sleep, or just the passage of time can bring a different perspective.

Women might also want to restart breastfeeding if they're in an [emergency situation](#) without services like water or power, such as a bushfire or cyclone.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, mothers have contacted the [Australian Breastfeeding Association](#) about starting breastfeeding again [because](#) they wanted to protect their babies from infection or were concerned about the availability of infant formula.

Almost any mother who wants to start breastfeeding again can. There are only a small number of health conditions that make breastfeeding [inadvisable for medical reasons](#).

However, relactation needs to be something you want to do because it is unlikely to succeed if your heart isn't really in it.

How can I start breastfeeding again?

When you stop breastfeeding, a [protein](#) in the milk signals your breasts to stop making milk. This decrease in milk production usually takes weeks.

If there is still some milk in your breasts, you can start rebuilding your supply by removing milk from your breasts as often as you can. You can do this by breastfeeding, if your baby is still willing, or by [expressing milk by hand](#) or with a [breast pump](#).

If your breasts aren't making milk any more, you can restore your supply by [relactation](#).

To start, you will need to stimulate your nipples frequently by encouraging your baby to suck at your breasts or by using a breast pump. This triggers the release of a hormone called [prolactin](#) that develops the milk-making structures in your breast to start producing milk. Once milk secretion begins, removing the milk from the breast signals your breasts to make more milk.

If your baby is willing to suckle, this is the easiest way to relactate. The more frequently they do this, the stronger the message to your breasts to develop and start making milk again.

Providing extra milk to your baby at the breast while they suck can help them suck for longer. You can provide this milk using a [breastfeeding supplementer](#). This is a container with a tube that carries expressed breastmilk or formula to your nipple. When your baby sucks at the breast, milk is drawn through the tube into your baby's mouth, along with any milk from your breast.

Alternatively, you can [drip milk over](#) your breast while your baby sucks.

However, some babies used to bottle feeding may be reluctant to

breastfeed at first. It's important to not try to force your baby. A breastfeeding counselor or lactation consultant can suggest ways to encourage them.

In the meantime, you can use a breast pump to stimulate the nipples and remove milk from your breasts. You can then give that expressed milk to your baby in a bottle or cup.

How long does relactation take?

You can start making milk within a few days or weeks. This depends on how long it has been since your baby last breastfed and how often you stimulate your nipples.

If your baby is willing to suckle, you will need to breastfeed at least eight times in 24 hours for the first few weeks to get milk-making started and to increase your milk supply.

Allowing your baby to breastfeed as often as they want to, even if they are only comfort-sucking, will speed up the process. It also [helps to keep your baby close](#) to your body as much as you can, day and night. This helps to maximize opportunities for suckling. Using a baby sling or carrier can help.

If your baby isn't ready to suckle yet, an electric breast pump that expresses both breasts at once is more effective than a single-electric (expresses one breast at a time) or manual pump. You'll need to use the pump for 10 to 20 minutes, six to eight times in 24 hours.

[Expressing milk by hand](#) after breastfeeds or using a [breast](#) pump can help remove any remaining milk. The emptier the breasts, the stronger the message they receive to make more milk.

You can also ask your GP about using a medication to increase your body's production of [prolactin](#), which can make relactation a little quicker.

Does it work?

If your baby is willing to suck frequently, the process can be quite simple. But other mothers and babies find it more challenging. For instance, sometimes making milk is easy but it takes more time for your baby to be willing to breastfeed.

If you stopped breastfeeding because of a problem, such as persistent nipple pain or mastitis, you might need some help to prevent this recurring. Every situation is different.

Having a [support network to cheer you on](#) as well as practical support from family and friends—such as making meals, helping with housework, or entertaining older children while you're occupied—will make the process much easier.

A lactation consultant or [Australian Breastfeeding Association](#) counselor can support you to start [breastfeeding](#) again.

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