



# Breast milk on the go

**EXPRESSING.** It is recommended that babies exclusively breastfeed for six months, however this is challenging for most mothers. Here is how one mother managed, writes **Flora Aduk.**

Every time I tell this story, one of my friends thinks I'm crazy. She shakes her head and just cannot fathom the decision I made to 'milk the heck out of my bossom'. Well, I must confess those are not the exact words I use, the specifics would not be the right choice for a family paper, but if your imagination is good, you can put some phrases in there somewhere.

With breastfeeding week on going, this is yet another opportunity to tell what I believe is a story of triumph. I breastfed my son, who turns four years at the end of next week exclusively for five months.

## What was needed

I made the deliberate choice to try the six months recommended by

health experts but even if I fell short by one month, I still look fondly on that stride. It was one mean feat if you ask me.

My first stop was the internet to read about taking care of breastmilk. I learnt that I never had to wait until I was back at work to start, I had to do it immediately to fill the void when I had to run errands away from home.

Next I went shopping for the needed containers, I was lucky to find some great plastic feeding bottles at one of the major supermarkets in town at just Shs5,000. I got a couple of wash clothes too and sanitizer. The most challenging item needed was a breast pump. While the prices of this varies from Shs30,000 and above, you will get a

great one at Shs175,000 and above. For starters I settled for the simple Camera brand one as I saved up for a better one. As luck could have it, one of my friends, impressed by my determination, gave me her Avent one and God was it amazing albeit manual! Shortly after this, my sister decided expressing milk was too much work for her and passed on her electric breast pump.

## Woman on a mission

Armed with these tools, I was in heaven, or so I thought. Expressing milk is much more than having the right tools. You must eat right and be mentally prepared. I got on a diet of greens called *boo* and *malakwang*, garden egg (*ntula*), took some fenugreek seeds and drunk lot of water. I decided to work out a time routine. My son had colic, so my evenings were crazy. He cried from 9pm until midnight, so during the first two months, it had to be in the afternoons when he was asleep.

## BACK AT WORK

When I went back to work, it was a whole new ball game—daunting. Initially, I had started freezing milk weeks before I went back but one day, power went off for the whole day and the milk defrosted. I had to pour away six bottles as thawed breast milk should not be refrozen, it was painful. With my stock less I had to focus on building it up as my son had to drink breastmilk while I was away at work. I once again hit the stores, bought a cooler and gel ice blocks. The dilemma was that there was nowhere to express milk at the office. A colleague had done it in rest room, the thought was sickening. I decided I would take lunch time off and do it in my car. Oh my! it was tough with the hot sun and trying to be discreet, but I relaxed and with no movies to distract me, this time music helped. After expressing, I would put the bottle in my cooler until I left office, and at home I could continue the night routine.

Sitting there and watching the milk flow slowly or gush out is not interesting, trust me. This is when I discovered series and my expression time became bliss. I became a film series addict and even joined a WhatsApp group of lovely ladies who spent the whole day and night

discussing the hottest series, just name it, I watched them all—with my hands supported on a cushion and pressing the pump or just waiting out the electric pump.

After the colic period, my boy became more active during the day, so I had to shift time to 11pm after all at home were asleep, I lost myself in the world of series and expressing breastmilk every night. Breast milk can last up to six or eight hours at room temperature, three to five days in the fridge and frozen it can go even for three weeks.

Breast feeding after maternity leave is very challenging, my experience inspired me to push the management for a maternity room where mothers can relax and express in the daytime, and store their milk in a fridge or even have a cup of tea. It took over two years for my colleague Carol and I to convince them and today, I'm glad that a mother determined to exclusively breastfeed will not have to sneak around in her car. My son never fell ill those months and while I had to introduce him to solid foods and later cow milk exclusively breastfeeding for five months was worth it. You should take the challenge.