

# Time to milk 'coming in'

## What is time to milk 'coming in'?

Time to milk 'coming in' is the time after birth at which secretory activation occurs.<sup>1</sup>  
The normal range of this occurrence is between 24 – 72 hours after delivery.<sup>2</sup>

### Secretory activation is identified by:

- three consecutive expression volumes of 20 ml or more from both breasts (combined) for exclusively pumping mothers.<sup>1</sup>
- physiological markers, such as a feeling of breast fullness for mothers breastfeeding and pumping.

## Why is time to milk 'coming in' important?

Delayed secretory activation (> 72 hours after birth) is linked to risks of persistent low milk volumes and a shortened duration of lactation.<sup>3,4</sup>

Risk factors for delayed secretory activation include: primigravida, preterm birth, caesarean section, high body mass index (>30), high levels of perinatal pain and stress, postpartum haemorrhage, mother – infant separation, delayed first breastfeeding episode, and low frequency of breastfeeding/expressing.<sup>3-5</sup>

## How to implement?

### Develop / revise protocols that:

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> identify mothers who have risk factors for delayed milk 'coming in' antenatally (where possible) and/or postnatally</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> provide mothers with risk factors education on the milk journey and the importance of timely milk 'coming in'</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> ensure staff provide increased lactation support to mothers with risk factors</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> provide mothers with a pumping log to track daily expressions and milk volumes track the number of hours from birth until the onset of secretory activation (identified as three consecutive expression volumes of &gt; 20 ml in exclusively pumping mothers)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> support regular staff education on the importance of the milk production journey</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> ensure that pumping/feeding commences early (within 3 hours of birth for pumping) and frequently (8 or more times in 24 hours)<sup>1</sup></li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> recommend pumping with initiation technology for effective breast stimulation supporting timely secretory activation and increased milk volumes once milk as 'coming in'<sup>1,6-8</sup></li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

## How to audit?

### Strategies to measure best practice include:

- Tracking the percentage of mothers who have their milk 'come in' within 72 hours after birth.
- Identifying mothers with delayed (> 72 hours) milk 'coming in'.
- Analysing reasons for delay and noting if timely additional lactation support was provided.

### Auditing records on a monthly basis:

- Highlights recent progress and can enhance motivation within the organisation to continue with quality improvement measures.
- Shows where changes are still required and allows for timely implementation of further education to staff for continuous improvements in clinical practice.
- Allows barriers to be identified and addressed.