

Breast Pumps: Leia Heckman, MS, CCC-SLP, CLC

Intro

I am Leia Heckman. I'm a Speech Language Pathologist. I've been practicing for over a dozen years. And I'm also a certified lactation counselor, and I've been one for about four years. And then I'm also an orofacial myofunctional therapist. But most importantly, I am a mom, and I'm currently pregnant with my fourth baby.

Why do you use a breast pump?

With me being pregnant with number four, this is now my fourth pumping experience. The first time that I pumped, I was pumping specifically to donate milk. The second time I pumped, I was pumping because I went back to work after maternity leave. I also pumped a lot during my maternity leave. So I would pump about eight to ten times a day in addition to breastfeeding to build up my supply. And then the third pumping experience, I pumped right when I went back to work and it was so that I could provide breast milk for my daughter when I was at work. And this time my expectation is to kind of do the same thing. I'm going to go back to work. And so I'll pump and provide breast milk.

How do you define a successful pumping session?

So when I am pumping during a pumping session, again, in thinking about my goal, if I'm pumping for donation, I don't necessarily have a goal in mind. With my last daughter, I had an ample enough supply. So in my brain, it was just I need to pump however many bottles she's going to take when she's apart from me. So if she's going to take three bottles while I'm at work, I need to pump three times. And I always knew I was going to get enough for those bottles. And then at the same time, I was also providing breast milk for a friend's daughter who didn't have- she was a working pumping mom, but she was producing about half. So I was feeding my daughter and then also another baby at the same time. It's really hard sometimes because that word success can really be defined by a number. So I feel like for me re-framing it in, okay, I'm not going to care about how many ounces I get during this pump- I am pumping to maintain my supply, to protect our breastfeeding relationship, while I'm not with my baby. So again, if I'm going to miss three or four bottles, I'm going to pump three or four times. With my son, I was producing about half. And so it took me a while to kind of get the mindset of I need to have four ounces or I need to have a certain amount of ounces per pump. Again, you just have to reframe it as I'm going to do this because I don't have my baby with me, and I want to be able to breastfeed when I go home.

There are a lot of factors that can inhibit output. I remember there had been several times where I've pumped, and I've gotten close to nothing. And it's really hard when you're in the moment and you don't get as much as you thought you were going to. Some things for me that have inhibited output is lack of sleep, which is really hard as a new mom and trying to take care of yourself, get enough rest. Especially if you're waking up in the middle of the night and pumping. Hydration. So I found that if I pump, I need to be drinking something. Eight ounces of water, coconut water, or anything that's hydrating. So kind of, again, re-framing, I'm providing this nutrition for my baby. I should be providing my body with nutrition. So for me the main things were a lack of sleep, lack of hydration, eating. So every time I would sit down and pump, I would try to eat and drink something. Stress and anxiety, which is really hard because you're pumping, you're not getting as much. You're going to be stressed out.

Some of the things that really helped me. And it sounds a little crazy, but, you know, if you understand the science behind it, I remember I didn't become a lactation counselor until after all of the pumping struggles with my son. And I went to the lactation counselor course, and I was still pumping at that time. And so during the course I would pump. They allowed pumping moms to pump. If you had a baby, could

bring your baby and breastfeed during the lactation course. And I have never gotten so much milk, and he was a year, and I had never pumped so much milk as I did during that week. And in looking back, we were watching videos of women breastfeeding their babies who didn't even have to be me breastfeeding. It was just talking about lactation and talking about breastfeeding in general. And I think that that really helped my output and sometimes we'll tell moms to record a video of your baby or have your significant other record a video of you breastfeeding and then play it back when you're pumping. It's really hard when you're away from your baby. Because typically you're in an environment- hopefully, you have access to a room that doesn't have other people in it, that's locked, that's clean- but it's not the same and our bodies don't behave the same as they do when we are nursing a baby. I've had some moms who will FaceTime their babies while they're pumping. And that helps with output. I work in the NICU and so we have cameras on the babies. And so some of the pumping moms will watch the cameras while they pump and that helps with output. So yeah, there are a lot of different things to inhibit. And then also some things that people may not, or they may think that it's a little crazy to do it, but I say give it a try.

What are the different types of breast pumps?

I love breast pumps. I- being a mom- I have experience using the Medela Pump in Style, the Spectra, and the Willow. And then I also have rented breast pumps from the hospital. And I think those are the Ameda brand. So I've used a wide variety of breast pumps. I've used hospital grade, non-hospital grade, closed systems, not closed systems. A combination of all of the different types.

Last time what was successful for me was using the Spectra pump with the Medela parts and pieces and flanges. I think that that was the most comfortable fit. So whatever pumping experience you have, I think it's important to know that there are other options out there versus what just comes in the box. And really seeking a professional to figure out correct fit, that kind of thing and comfort because it should never be uncomfortable.

How did you decide which pump to use?

I have a lot of mom friends and so I would always ask them, Hey, what do you think about your pump? My pump was provided by insurance and a lot of insurance companies will only give you certain options, or they will give you a certain amount of money towards a pump. So for example, if I wanted to get the Willow or the updated Willow, I would call my insurance company. They would say, Hey, we'll give you a \$100 towards the Willow or whatever it is. For me, it was what can I get and not spend loads of money on? So yeah, for me, the Spectra was provided.

There is another Spectra model that you don't have to be plugged in to use. I have a car charger for my Spectra. So I found that if I was driving, I was pumping. And I have rolled through lots of drive-throughs while pumping and you just- you figure it out. Yeah, that was my downtime- I'm going to multitask. If I have a 15, 20, 30 minute drive, I'm going to schedule it in my day so that I can pump at the same time. And when I get to my destination, figure out how to put everything back together. So yeah, anything that you can do for multitasking, same thing for the Willow. If I have to take my dog out three times a day, I'm going to pump while I do it. I don't have access to an outlet unless I take an extension cord. So I need something that's portable. I'm going to get the Willow. So yeah, I think that every person has to figure out what's gonna work best for them. And if you're pumping and feeding, trying to figure out how to multitask while doing it.

What are some features of a breast pump?

So I have a couple of pumps with me. The preferred one that I was using was the Spectra. Most of the pumps function about the same. They have a few different settings. One is the cycle, which means how many pumps in a given minute. So you can always change that, and most breast pumps have that. The

other is the vacuum or the suction. So a little bit of suction, a lot of suction. And there's a range in between. The other thing I like about the breast pumps that have this is a lot of them will have a stimulation phase. So initially when you turn it on, you can press the stimulation button. And typically it will be low suction and very rapid to kind of mimic an infant. And then after a letdown, you switch it to pumping mode. So the vacuum, the suction increases and the frequency of pumping per minute, it decreases. So most of the pumps work that way. So I like the Spectra. And then the Medela kind of functions the same way. The Spectra has a digital output of a number. So sometimes it's easy to remember- in stimulation phase, my cycle is X number and my vacuum is X number. And then I switch to, you know, the pumping phase. The other thing that's nice about the Spectra is it saves your settings. So every time I don't have to adjust anything, I just press the power button and it knows the settings. Medela, I also like it has a stimulation button and then this one has a dial. So min to max suction. So this every single time you are adjusting during the pumping. Both of them can be a single side pump or they can pump both sides at the same time. For me, I never pumped one side. I always pumped both. But I do know some moms who will- they can nurse on one side and pump on the other.

And then I also have the Willow here. And the Willow is nice because I know for me during my maternity leave, I also have a dog that's very active. And so I would put my baby to bed, put the Willow on, and go outside and play ball with my dog. And so it was nice for that feature. However, this part right here that's opaque- and I think they've come out with a newer model- but you can't really see what's happening. So once you put it on, you just kinda cross your fingers and hope that things are okay if it doesn't hurt. So that's one of the downsides to this, is that you don't really know what's happening. And you can't see anything in here. So you don't even know at the end of 20 or 30 minutes if there's any milk in there at all. There is an app that goes with the Willow. However, I always had issues with the app. I felt like it never counted right. That kind of thing. Inside the Willow, the storage bags are not super user-friendly. They're in the shape of a donut. And so for storage, I always felt like it got a little difficult. They're also really difficult to pour from. And these bags are single use only, so you can use them one time. There are a couple of hacks out there online, but I never found that they were really helpful. So yeah, that is the Willow. A pro to it, is that you can pump and lay down at the same time. So you can set your alarm for 30 minutes. These do have an automatic shut off at 30 minutes. The Spectra has an automatic shut off after 30 minutes. The Medela does not have an automatic shut off. So if you fall asleep while you're pumping, you'll just continue to be pumped. So I like the fact that pumps have a 30 minute shut off for safety for these tired moms. Okay. And those are those are the pumps that I used.

I think that for me using a range of having a base pump in the Spectra that I was comfortable with and then having something like the Willow. Last time, with me having an oversupply, feeding my daughter and donating milk, I would typically use the Willow and pump on one side and nurse on the other. So that was a nice option, especially if we were going to go out to dinner or really anywhere, I would just assemble the Willow, put it in a gallon Ziploc bag, put it in the baby bag and we were good to go. So it was a nice option to have if I was out. I didn't feel like I had to then carry my big pump around. So yeah, that is the nice feature of the portable pump is being able to take it and go and pump on one side and nurse on the other.

What improvements do you recommend?

So as far as improvements to pumps, I would say I really like the 30-minute cutoff. So the pumps that don't have that, it would be really nice to have that. Anything that can be hands-free. So for me, the way that I was able to be hands-free was with the pumping bra. And I've even had moms who if they either don't have access to one or they can't afford one, will take a sports bra, a \$3 sports bra and will just cut holes and the flanges can fit right in there. But these are really nice to be hands-free. I don't know that I could have pumped without being hands-free. So this. And then as far as other things about the pump that would make it make it better. Some of them I feel like, for example, the Spectra, it has this nice bottle

holder here, but I've never used it. Typically I'm pumping both sides at the same time. So in theory, I would need both. Also, I never have bottles just sitting anywhere. They're always attached to me, and then I deal with the milk. So perhaps, maybe this could be cut off or the Spectra could have been smaller. It is pretty portable but, you know, something smaller or utilized for something else.

How do you know which settings to use?

I knew pumping should never be painful or uncomfortable. And so same thing with nursing. Nursing, breastfeeding should feel exactly like what it is. It's a baby who is sucking on your breast. It should never be painful or discomfort or uncomfortable. Same thing with pumping. So as far as figuring out the settings for the breast pump, I would- it's kind of trial and error. I knew that I have to hit a stimulation phase first. So if I know that the cycles are very rapid, I'm going to increase the cycles, the frequency of cycle. And with the vacuum, the thing with the Spectra is it doesn't let you go above a certain vacuum. So there's pretty much no chance that it's going to cause damage, especially in the stimulation phase. And then after, once I got a letdown, then I would go into the pumping mode. And for me, pumping typically took a full 30 minutes. I had friends that would- we'd go into the pumping room together, they would hook themselves up, they would it feels like pump a gallon of milk in about 10 minutes, and then I was still there 20 minutes later pumping. And so I think that it also depends on the mom's flow. So if we have a slower flow or we need more suction, then we have to replicate that in our pump. And so for me, I would adjust that the cycles and the vacuum until it was at a steady-state, not uncomfortable. If I bumped up the vacuum and it was uncomfortable, I would bump it back down. Some days I felt like the vacuum was higher than others. Some times of the day, that kind of thing, it just depended on- our bodies change as our babies grow. And so I think that just taking stock of where you are in the moment, you know, what feels comfortable and okay- is probably what's best.

How do you know if the pump is working correctly?

With pumping, I would say for the most part, the Spectra and the Medela were the most consistent, as far as me not having issues. If I had issues, I would notice them in that- I'm having a little pain or discomfort. Maybe I should adjust the suction or the cycle. If I wasn't getting any milk, I knew something was going on. And so you just kind of- it's the same as my computer's not working, I'm going to unplug it and plug it back in, right? So you kind of go through the different connector pieces. Is this flush with this, is this connecting to this? Each pump has a membrane or a duckbill. So making sure that nothing is clogged if everything is working right. I know that for me every three to six months I would replace the membranes or the duck-bills because there's build-up, they get worn out over time, that kind of thing. So just making sure, just like with any piece of machinery, making sure that everything is able to flow, there's an avenue for flow, there's no build up anywhere. We're replacing parts as needed, that kind of thing. So yeah, I would notice things not going well if I wasn't getting as much milk.

The other thing is, and I didn't know this, most motors last, like the manufacturers only guarantee them for like a year. And it's not for like exclusive pumpers. So like if you're an exclusive pumper, you're pumping 8, 10, 12 times a day versus for me if I was pumping away from work or if I was at work, I was pumping three or four times a day. So if you're an exclusive pumper, you're literally using it twice as much. And so yeah, I feel like maybe the motors should last a little longer. The other thing is I feel like if the motors lasted longer, you wouldn't have women like me that have like a pump graveyard, right? And I would say, oh, you know, this one is still good from last time, maybe I don't need another one, but there's no guarantee. So every single time I get a new pump and then now I have about six pumps.

We're kind of creating waste. And there are so many women out there that I've worked with who would love a breast pump.

Describe your cleaning process.

So when I'm done pumping, I will typically have this on and the flanges are inside here like this. And so after I'm done pumping- anytime I'm pumping, I always have a paper towel, multiple layers of paper towels down. I've washed my hands. So I will take the flange out and typically set the bottles down. The first thing I do is I deal with the milk because one time I, I think I took the pumping bra off and I spilled the milk and- crying over spilled milk is, I think they say it, it should probably be about breast milk because it is a very sad day when that happens. So I always deal with the milk first. I typically open the bottle and then I put all of my milk into bags. I also, when I am pumping for bottles for daycare, I bring empty bottles with me. So for example, if my daughter is going to get five ounces per bottle and I have pumped seven ounces in a pump- I make a five ounce bottle, I put the top on the bottle, and I put it in a cooler. And then I take the remaining two ounces and put it in the next bottle. My next pump, if I get another seven ounces, I top that bottle off, and I start a next bottle. Same thing and then whatever I have left over, at the end of the day- so if I've made five ounce bottles, three of them, and I have 2 ounces left, I'll put it in a bag. And then I typically will mark it with today's date and two ounces. And then I'll either use it for the next day or it'll go into the freezer. I also have a gallon Ziploc bag that I put all of my pieces and parts in and I stick it right in the fridge. When I'm at work, because the Ziplock bags are clear, I have a wet-dry bag, and it actually has a strap that hooks right onto my pumping bags so it doesn't scream, "Breast parts, right? Breast milk parts." So I use that. I put it right into the fridge. I am fortunate enough to have a place that I can pump. They have a breast milk-specific refrigerator. So I am not putting my daughter's bottles or my pump parts in with everyone else's lunch. So that's really nice. So yeah, I always deal with the milk first. I learned my lesson. And then at home, those bottles are ready for the next day. And then I go through the sanitation process. And so depending on how many things I have for the day to sanitize, I will boil a pot of water, while I'm making dinner and sanitize bottles. I also use- this one happens to be a Medela, but a lot of other companies make them- the steam bags. It's really nice to just pop it in the in the microwave. So yeah, a combination of both of those.

I would say for sanitation purposes, would love like a system that is closed. In situations like oh, you know, we're all pumping and I forgot my pump, right? Well, you know, I shouldn't really be using someone's pump if it's not a closed system. Or like with the Spectra, when I'm done with the Spectra, when I'm done pumping, I can give it to somebody because it's a closed system. I can't, in good conscience give the Medela to someone because it's not a closed system.