

# Here's What 34 Parents Think About Their Electric Breast Pumps

Study participants helped CR evaluate models from several popular brands, including Motif, Spectra, and Medela

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Breastfeeding a baby when you have your own life to live isn't easy. Breast pumps, though, should make it easier. With a breast pump, you'll be able to ensure you have milk available when you're not able to breastfeed, whether that means you're running errands, heading back to the office, or traveling. Some breastfeeding parents decide for a variety of reasons that they'll be exclusively pumping—in other words, their baby drinks only pumped milk, not milk directly from the breast. Figuring out in what situations you think you'll use your pump will help you choose the best one for you.

Consumer Reports recruited 34 users of four popular double electric breast pumps to assess their experiences using them, including what they like and dislike about their pumps. We found that participants were a fan of the pumps they used (for some, after a learning curve), but that some have features or flaws that are worth noting before purchase.

## What People Thought About These Breast Pumps

**Setup:** Our participants generally viewed setup as straightforward and easy, and often got easier as participants grew accustomed to their pumps. The products' instruction manuals, lactation consultants, as well as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and other online websites, proved to be invaluable sources of information to the parents who were using these pumps. When buying a pump, you may find that YouTube pump reviews and instructional videos can provide additional value as you familiarize yourself with the device.

**Suction level:** Our participants had few issues with the suction levels offered by their pumps. All of



Photos: Consumer Reports

the pumps, with the exception of the Medela Pump in Style, have LCD screens that show the suction and speed levels, allow the user to adjust the suction and speed levels, and remember the last inputted setting. For Medela, there are no visible displays and one cannot adjust the speed.

**Comfort:** Though pumping is generally not the most pleasant of activities, most of our participants found their breast pumps to be relatively comfortable to use. Some comfort issues were generally attributed not to the pump itself, but to the flange size/fit or material, which can be switched out. Flanges, also known as breast shields, fit over the areola to ensure a snug seal.

**Noise:** Although no participants professed irritation with their pumps' sound levels at first, several said at the end of their surveys that they wished the pumps were quieter.

**Cleaning:** Breastfeeding parents considered cleaning these pumps to be a hassle. Each pump has many parts—and a lot of them are quite small—with

corners and crevices that are difficult to get clean. Some folks purchased extra parts so that they wouldn't have to clean the pump as often.

Ultimately, choosing a pump may be a function of whether it is covered under medical insurance, either free or with an upgrade, and this may be the determining factor in selecting a pump. You may also be able to purchase a pump via your Flexible Spending Account (FSA) or Health Savings Account (HSA) plan. If a pump isn't covered by medical insurance, shop around for the best price, because prices vary.

Before pumping, be sure to measure for the correct flange size and fit. This can be done by consultation with a medical professional, lactation expert, and/or via online resources.

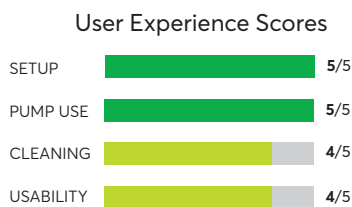
Decide whether the following features are important to have: a nightlight, a visible timer, a readout to see what settings your pump is set to while pumping and after turning the pump back on again, and accessories, such as a carrying bag, extra parts so that one doesn't have to wash as often, a cooler bag or a car charger so that one can be more mobile while using the pump.

Hold on to the manual for easy reference (though one can also look at websites and social media for useful information and videos) and follow the cleaning instructions as provided by the manufacturer.

## How Each Pump Fared

### Motif Medical Luna Double (without battery)

Price Paid: **\$144**



**Shop:** Amazon, Motif Medical

This pump tied with the Spectra S2 Plus as our highest-scoring pump. It comes with two milk containers; it does not come with a carrying case, though the company sells one separately. A visible timer is found on the pump, as well as a readout of the suction and speed settings. In order to operate, it must be plugged into a wall outlet.

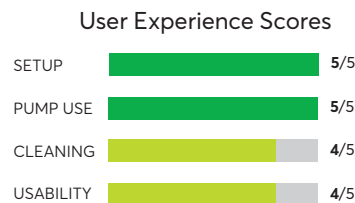
Owners found it to be quick and simple to use. They also appreciated that it was amenable to

nighttime pumping. "The LED light helps see the buttons at night without having to turn on a bright light and disturbing my family," one participant said. "Also, it is very quiet." Another parent, who said that the breast pump didn't wake her daughter, said the noise was "more of a soothing, buzzing sound."

Motif instructs users not to place parts that come in contact with the breast milk in the dishwasher, but nevertheless, participants found the pump fine to clean, with one parent calling the cleaning process "about equal in regards to difficulty" to other pumps.

### Spectra S2 Plus

Price Paid: **\$173**



**Shop:** Amazon, Target

The Spectra S2 Plus tied with the Motif Luna for the most highly scoring pump, being noted as simple to set up and use. It, like all pumps except Medela, comes with a nightlight and visible timer and also remembers your last suction and speed settings so that you don't have to reconfigure the pump with each use. In order to operate, it must be plugged into a wall outlet. Unlike the Motif Luna, parts that come in contact with breast milk are dishwasher-safe, though nevertheless, several participants found the pump "tedious" and "time-consuming" to clean. "There are a lot of parts to clean. I wish there was less to make it easier," said one user.

Participants liked being able to see and set the speed and suction settings separately. "If my breasts are sore, then I can slow down the cycle and vacuum, and if they aren't, then I can do it harder. I change the settings to my comfort," said one participant. Some participants also found that the pump worked quickly and that it was quiet and comfortable, and had good suction. Though one participant and frequent pumper said her valves became less effective with time, she was able to order replacements on Amazon.

Though participants overall liked this pump, they had critiques. Some found it too large to transport around (the pump weighs 2.5 pounds). One parent found the tubing difficult to attach to the pump, and reported that she had to use tweezers to connect

various pieces together.

This pump doesn't come with its own case unless you choose the pump as part of a "bundle," which comes with a case and a cooler. A tote can also be purchased separately.

### Medela Pump in Style

Price Paid: **\$350**

#### User Experience Scores



### Shop: Amazon, Target

The Medela Pump in Style, noted for its simplicity (it has only four buttons) is the only pump of those we tested that comes with an app. This model also automatically comes with a carrying case and a cooler bag with an ice pack and four bottles instead of two. While it is the lightest of all the evaluated pumps, if one doesn't want to plug it into a wall outlet, it comes with a battery pack that requires the user to supply eight batteries. However, one participant said that she didn't find it particularly easy to tote around. "It's awkward to carry and the tubing is hard to manage, so being portable is a stretch," she said. None of the participants used or even knew about the app.

A few participants complained about the noise with this pump. "I always feel like I have to remove myself from the room because of how loud it can be," said one parent, while another said she had better success with the pump once she found a better room to pump in.

On the plus side, the parts that come in contact with the breast milk are dishwasher-safe, though Medela warns about possible discoloration. This pump doesn't come with a nightlight, visible timer, or readout of the suction settings. Speed is also not adjustable, and the pump does not remember settings for the next session.

### Spectra S1 Plus

Price Paid: **\$217**

#### User Experience Scores



### Shop: Amazon, Target

This dishwasher-safe pump is the only one we looked at that comes with a rechargeable battery. Some participants found it easy to use on the go, but others considered it to be too heavy and bulky to use away from home. "I would say the portability is probably the best part to me, especially living in an RV and traveling a lot," said one parent, though another found the 3-pound pump to be "on the heavier side."

One of the most frequent complaints with the Spectra pumps had to do with having and using incorrectly sized flanges, which could happen with any of the pumps. For Spectra, one has to go to the website in order to get information on how to measure for flange size; this information is not included in the instruction manual. Two parents relied on Instagram and YouTube to figure out how to use the pump.

What about what people *did* like? As with the Spectra S2 Plus, folks liked that the Spectra S1 Plus was easy to use, had good suction, and remembered their settings for next time. They also appreciated its nightlight. "It's a small feature, but I use it daily," said one parent. The pump also comes with a visible timer and a readout of the speed and suction settings.

## How We Studied Breast Pumps

For our story, we enlisted 34 lactating people and learned about their personal journeys with one of four popular double electric breast pumps: the Medela Pump in Style, the Motif Medical Luna Double (without the battery), the Spectra S1 Plus, and the Spectra S2 Plus. We recruited a mix of first-time pump users and experienced ones. All participants obtained their pumps within the past year and use it frequently—typically several times a day.

Our participants scored their breast pump according to a number of factors that affect the ease and comfort of use. Questions our participants considered include:

- How easy is the initial and current setup of the pump?
- How easy is the pump to use? For example, is it consistent in its performance? Is it comfortable? Is the sound of the pump bothersome?
- Did the suction levels meet your needs?
- How easy is it to clean the pump?

Consumer Reports didn't test any of these pumps ourselves, so we can't verify manufacturer claims.