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## Parental Information

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**Expressing colostrum  
in the ante natal period**

## Congratulations on your pregnancy!

Colostrum is your early breastmilk and expressing this in the ante natal period is called ante natal colostrum harvesting. This leaflet will give you important information about colostrum harvesting, but please discuss with your midwife or infant feeding support worker if you are worried about anything or need support with colostrum harvesting.

NHS Highland is committed to supporting and promoting breastfeeding as the healthiest way to feed your baby. Breastfeeding is a unique interaction between a mother and a baby and has many benefits including good emotional and physical health for your baby.

Breastfeeding helps to protect both you and your baby from developing certain health condition.

Your midwife will have already discussed any risk factors with you, which may stop you from expressing breast milk in the ante natal period. If anything changes please inform your midwife straight away.

## When to start colostrum harvesting?

It is recommended to start colostrum harvesting from 36 – 37 weeks. Your pack will be sent out to you only when you are at this stage in your pregnancy and this will be via Royal Mail post.

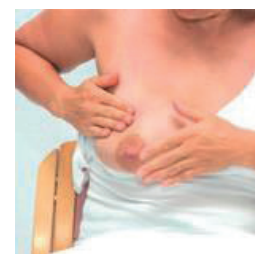
## What is in my colostrum harvesting pack?

- This leaflet
- Sterilised syringes and caps to seal them
- Labels - on the label, write clearly:
  - your own surname
  - your CHI Number
  - the date and time expressed
  - if freezing the colostrum, the date and time that you froze it.

## How do I hand express?

Gentle expressing should be carried out once or twice initially per day then build up to not more than 5 times per day. It should only be carried out via hand and a pump should **not** be used at all in the ante natal period.

Make sure you are relaxed and take your time. Wash your hands before you start.



### Step 1

Before you start to express by hand, gently massage your breast and roll your nipple to stimulate the hormones needed to release colostrum.



### Step 2

Position your thumb and fingers in a 'C' shape, 2cm to 3cm back from the base of your nipple.



### Step 3

Gently press and release, press and release, and keep repeating until you see a glisten or a drop of colostrum. This may take a few minutes. Collect the colostrum in the syringe. Don't worry if you don't get anything.



### Step 4

When the drips slow down or stop move your fingers round to a different part of your breast and start again. Only try to express for a total of 3-5 minutes on each breast.

**IMPORTANT** – Please do not worry if you get no colostrum in the antenatal period – this is not indicative of post natal milk supply. Just by stimulating your breast and learning the skill of expressing will be so supportive to you once you have your baby.

### How to store expressed milk?

- Once you have collected the colostrum in the purple syringe please replace the small round cap securely on to the top of the syringe.
- Write out your name and date and time that you expressed the colostrum and wrap this label around the syringe.
- Once the milk has cooled place it in the clear collection bag and then place the bag with the syringe in the fridge (if you are going to have your baby within the next 5 days) or in the freezer..
- Each time you express follow the same process adding the labelled syringe into the collection bag.
- Storing in the fridge
- Store bags at the back of the fridge. Colostrum syringes can be kept for up to 5 days in the fridge (maximum fridge temperature 4°C).
- Storing in the freezer
- If birth is not expected in the next day or so, freeze colostrum as soon as you can. The freezer should have a temperature below -18°C.



### When should I take my colostrum to hospital?

- You should bring your stored colostrum when you come in for the birth of your baby (e.g. when you are in labour, or when you come into hospital for a planned induction or caesarean section).
- Bring your frozen colostrum with you in a cool bag with ice packs.
- Inform the midwife that you have it when you arrive.
- Your colostrum should be clearly labelled with your name and CHI number – we are unable to store this or offer to your baby in the hospital if not.
- It will be safely stored in a fridge or freezer until it's needed. Within hospital we have special machines to defrost the colostrum quickly if needed but if you are using at home frozen colostrum should be defrosted in your fridge. Only defrost small amounts as you need them to reduce wastage.
- Once defrosted, colostrum should be used within 12 - 24 hours or discarded.



**IMPORTANT** – You may find that when you express you feel your womb going hard and relaxing. These are 'Braxton Hicks' contractions. Don't worry about these, unless they begin to feel like period-type cramps or mild labour contractions. If you experience uterine contractions stop expressing immediately and rest. If the contractions do not stop in a couple of hours, contact the maternity assessment unit for advice.

## When will I use my colostrum?

If your baby breastfeeds successfully following his or her birth and your expressed colostrum is not required, this is great news! The time you spend expressing will not be wasted as it will give you knowledge of how to hand express and provide the body with early stimulation of the milk producing hormones.



However, if you have any difficulties feeding your baby after the birth, your baby can be given this valuable expressed colostrum whilst you both continue to learn the skills of breastfeeding. You can express fresh colostrum to feed your baby and use any stored milk instead of formula milk. Remember to ask for your stored colostrum before you are discharged, so that you can take it home again.

## Notes

## Acknowledgements

The Scottish Infant Feeding Advisor's Network (SIFAN). Guidance on Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting (2018).

[www.anchb.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.anchb.scot.nhs.uk)