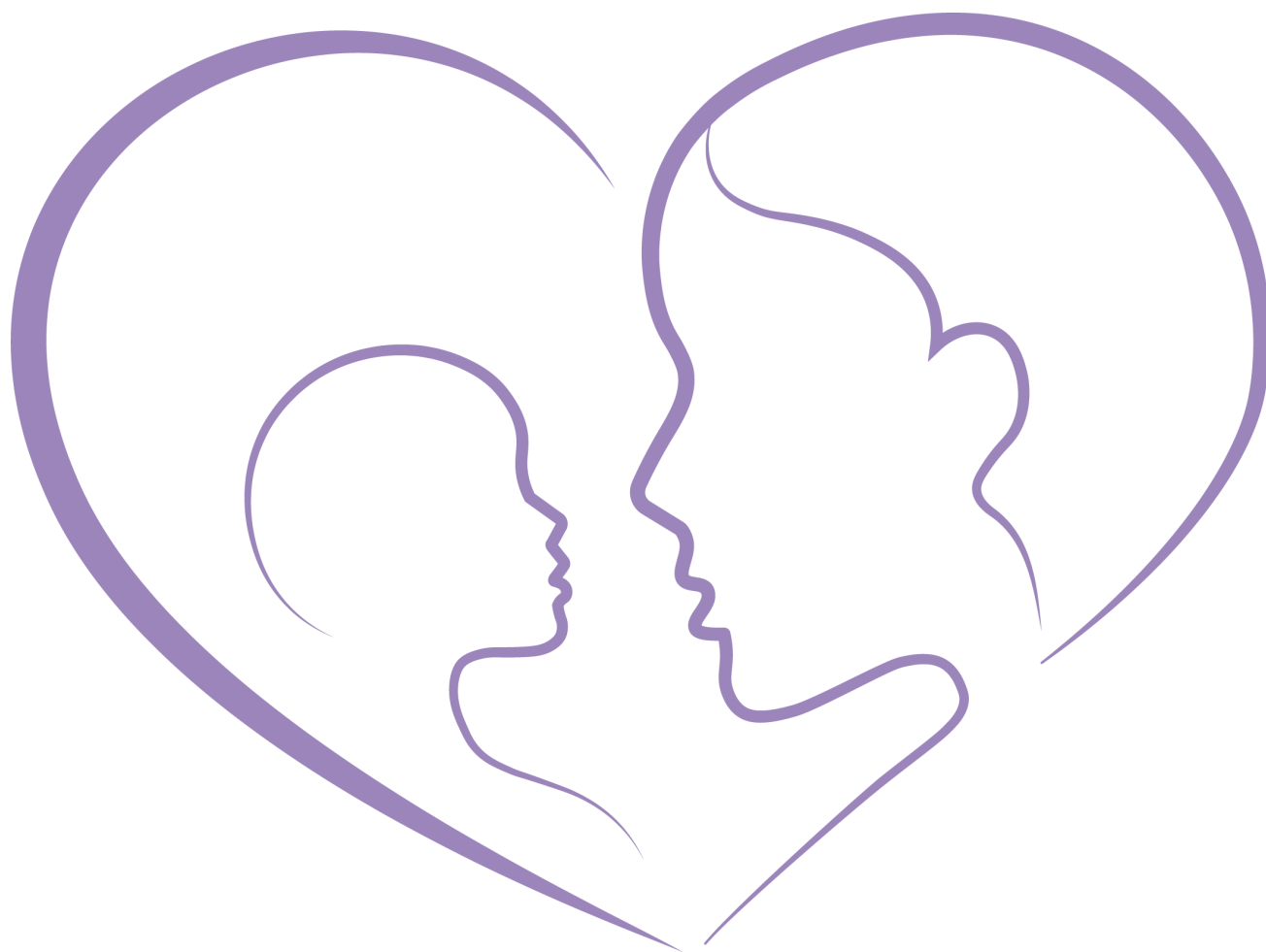


# Antenatal Hand Expressing

**Maternity Services Lothian**



**Information for pregnant women with diabetes**

## Introduction

This booklet is designed to help you find out important information about expressing your own colostrum during pregnancy. Colostrum is highly concentrated breastmilk. Your body starts producing colostrum whilst you are pregnant. If you are planning on breastfeeding, hand expressing is a useful technique for obtaining colostrum in the first few days for your baby.

If you are pregnant and have diabetes, even if this has developed during your pregnancy, your baby is at a higher risk of developing low blood sugars after birth. Expressed colostrum can be used to feed your baby if they are a little bit sleepy and not yet managing to feed from the breast as frequently as needed, or if they have low blood sugars. Please be assured that we will monitor your baby very closely. This will involve a little heel prick test to check your baby's blood sugar before their 2nd and 3rd feed.

Breastmilk is unique in that it is more efficient at maintaining blood sugars for your baby than formula (*I R A Chertok et al. 2009*). Moreover, babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop diabetes later in life (*Martens et al. 2016*).

Research shows that it is safe to hand express from 36 weeks of pregnancy, do not hand express earlier than this as the hormones involved could potentially trigger labour. Do not use a breast pump to express your milk in pregnancy.

If you are wishing to hand express your colostrum before your baby is born, it is important that you discuss this with your midwife or obstetrician so that you have all the information available to you.

**Antenatal hand expressing is about building your confidence with hand expressing rather than focusing on the amounts you are able to produce.**

**It is the opportunity to practice a skill that will be very useful once your baby is born.**

## **Why should you hand express before you give birth?**

- Boosts confidence. Once your baby is here you have the self-belief that there is milk for your baby when they are feeding from the breast.
- Familiarise yourself and have time to practice and learn the technique so that you are more confident once your baby is born.
- Hand expressing colostrum is a great way to encourage your baby to attach to the breast and feed in the early hours and days of breastfeeding.
- UNICEF UK Breastfeeding Friendly Initiative recommends all breastfeeding mothers are shown how to hand express.
- Babies of mothers with diabetes are more likely to have low blood sugars in the first few hours after birth and, any colostrum you give, will minimise the use of other supplements.
- Build up a supply of colostrum to give to your baby in case they need additional feeding support.

**Please be aware that you might only collect very little or no colostrum at all, this is very normal. It is more important that you become familiar with the technique rather than focusing on the amounts you can produce.**

## Important information you should know before you begin

Please discuss antenatal hand expressing with your midwife/obstetrician before beginning to do this.

### **Do not hand express when pregnant if you have:**

- Had a previous caesarean section
- A cervical suture in place
- Vaginal bleeding in your current pregnancy
- Threatened or actual pre-term labour in your current pregnancy
- Pre-term ruptured membranes (where the amniotic sac around your baby breaks open before labour)
- Polyhydramnios (very large volume of water around your baby)
- Multiple pregnancy (expecting more than one baby)
- Recurrent skin and/or soft tissue infection
- MRSA infection (Methicillin resistant staph aureus)
- MDR infection (Multi Drug Resistant) including CPE (Carbapenemase resistant enterobacteriaceae) organisms

Some women may experience painless tightening sensations over their abdomen when hand expressing which is often known as Braxton Hicks contractions.

Should these contractions feel like cramps or period pain, you must stop hand expressing and contact your midwife for further guidance.

## **The tips below should help you with antenatal hand expressing:**

- The hormone that helps with your milk production works better when you are feeling relaxed and calm. Make sure you are in a peaceful environment and that you take your time.
- Always wash your hands with soap and hot water and then dry with a clean towel.
- Gently massage each breast before you start to hand express.
- Begin with 3-5 minutes on each breast.
- Spend around 5-10 minutes at each session approximately 1-2 times per day, you do not need to hand express every day
- To begin with, the amount of colostrum is quite often a glisten or a very small drop.
- Over a few days some women find the amount will increase and for some it won't.
- Some women can find their breasts are tender and uncomfortable during pregnancy. Hand expressing should not make your breasts sore.

**The use of a breast pump is not recommended in pregnancy for expressing colostrum.**

# How do I express by hand?

## Step 1

Before you begin to express by hand, start by gently massaging your breast to stimulate the hormones needed to release colostrum.



## Step 2

Position your thumb and fingers in a 'C' shape, 2-3cm 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-continue for 3-5 minutes on each breast.



## Step 4

If the flow or drops subside, move your fingers round to a different part of your breast and start again.

Adapted from Public Health Scotland 2021





Colostrum comes in different shades, from clear to bright yellow and one colour is not better than the other.

Your colostrum is perfectly designed for your baby.

## To collect colostrum

Pull back on the syringe plunger to suck up colostrum directly from the nipple.



You may find it easier to pull the plunger out of the syringe (it is easier to do this when the cap is off). Once the plunger has been removed, replace the cap and use the open end to scoop up the drops of colostrum. Replace the plunger when you have finished collecting.





## Equipment

An expressing pack will be given to you by your midwife so you can be ready to begin hand expressing.

The expressing pack will contain the following items:-

- Sealable plastic bags
- Hand Expressing information booklet
- Sterilised syringes and caps to seal the syringes
- Labels - on the label, write clearly your own surname, CHI Number and date and time expressed.



### What is a CHI number?

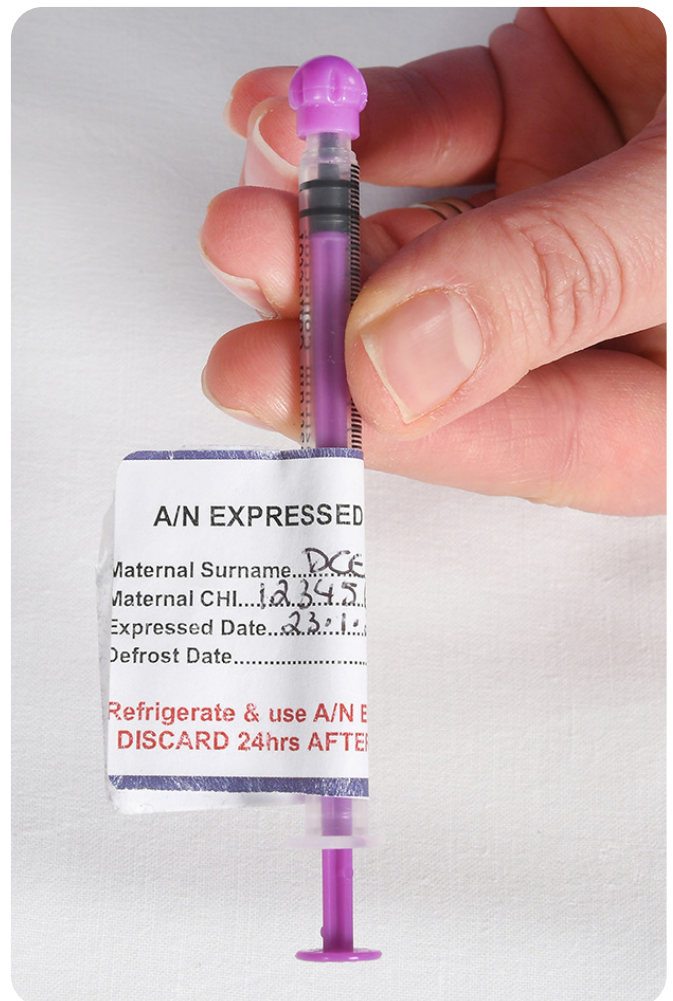
A CHI number is unique number to identify you in the health care system.

Your CHI number can be found in your pregnancy hand held records; your midwife can discuss this with you.

## Storage of antenatal expressed colostrum

Place in fridge or freezer within 30 minutes of expressing

- Colostrum should be collected in a new sterile syringe each time you express
- A cap should be placed over the end of the syringe to seal it
- Each syringe should be labelled using the label provided
- The syringe should be placed in a sealable plastic bag
- Antenatally expressed breastmilk can only be stored in the fridge between 0 and 4°C for 24 hours. It is better to place it in the freezer where it can be stored for a maximum of 6 months.
- All your stored syringes, for each 24 hour period, can be placed in the same bag in the freezer
- You can store your labelled expressed colostrum syringes in a plastic bag and place in a freezer to store below -18°C (not the ice compartment within a fridge)



**We encourage you to keep your expressed milk at home rather than bringing it into hospital.**

- Please store all the plastic bags of syringes in a suitable freezer container to protect them from accidental damage
- Frozen expressed breast milk can be defrosted in the fridge but must be discarded within 24 hours of being placed in the fridge. There is a space on the label for writing date and time out of fridge (defrost time)
- By practicing the technique when pregnant, if your baby requires expressed colostrum, you'll have the skill to quickly express for them there and then. It is important to prioritise breastfeeding or hand expressing once your baby is born rather than routinely giving your antenatally expressed colostrum
- If, following the birth of your baby, any antenatal colostrum from home requires to be transported to hospital, place it in a cool bag/chilled container surrounded by icepacks (not ice).
- Bring any unused frozen expressed colostrum home when you and your baby are discharged, otherwise it will have to be discarded

**If the cap falls off the syringe or if there is a leak of colostrum into the bag, it will not be given to your baby due to the risk of contamination.**

## Useful Information

The technique of hand expressing is available to view via the following web links:

### **NHS Health Scotland**

[www.healthscotland.com/documents/120.aspx](http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/120.aspx)

### **Or UNICEF website**

[www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/)

### **Further information on expressing and storing breast milk can be found on UNICEF website**

[www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/)

Scan the QR codes below with your mobile phone camera for more information from NHS Lothian's website:

**<https://services.nhslothian.scot/Maternity>**



**Hand Expressing  
Video**



**Feeding your  
baby**



**Feeding  
options**



**Maternity  
Services**

## Acknowledgements

- The Scottish Infant Feeding Advisor's Network (SIFAN) Guidance on Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting (2018)
- Antenatal Expression of Breastmilk Project for Government (PFG) Steering Group NHS Lothian
- DAME Study 2017 (Diabetes and Antenatal Milk Expressing)
- NHS Lothian Medical Photography Service (23\_01668).

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