

Children's, Women's and
Sexual Health Services



Breastfeeding and expressing colostrum during pregnancy

Information for you



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The health benefits of breastfeeding for both you and your baby is well established. Producing breastmilk is a natural process and your body starts to get ready during pregnancy by making colostrum. Colostrum is concentrated nutrition especially made for your baby that is easy to digest and packed with protective factors.

Reasons you should think about expressing colostrum antenatally

Some babies are at increased risk of low blood sugars in the first few hours after birth. For example babies born small for their date or babies born to mothers with diabetes. Some babies may need more fluids/nutrition in the early postnatal period than they can get directly from the breast. You may have increased risk of delay in production of breastmilk in the early postnatal period.

Expressing and storing colostrum during your pregnancy can reduce the need for and/or amount of infant formula your baby needs.

Who should think about expressing colostrum antenatally:

- Women with diabetes in pregnancy (pre-existing or gestational)
- Mothers with high blood pressure who are taking beta blockers
- Mothers having elective caesarean section
- Women with polycystic ovary disease or syndrome (hyperandrogenesis)
- Infant diagnosed during the antenatal period with congenital conditions that may cause problems with feeding in the early days
- Women with reduced glandular breast tissue
- Women who have had breast surgery
- Women with multiple sclerosis
- Strong family history of dairy intolerance or inflammatory bowel disease

Reasons not to express colostrum antenatally

Antenatal colostrum harvesting will not be recommended if:

- You have a history of threatened or actual preterm labour
- You have a history of cervical incompetence
- You have had a suture put in the neck of the womb to prevent preterm labour

This is because there is a very small chance that antenatal expression can trigger labour to start.

When to start

During the final month of pregnancy (after 36 completed weeks) colostrum can be expressed.

How often should I express

You can collect your colostrum two to three times per day.

You will be given the equipment needed to collect colostrum. This includes colostrum syringes and labels.

Collecting and storing colostrum

How to hand express

A good time to have a first practice is in the bath or shower.

Start by making sure your hands are clean and that you have a sterilized container to hand.

1. Get comfortable making sure that you are as relaxed as possible.
2. To help the milk flow it can be useful to shower or have a relaxing bath before expressing. You can also use some warm cloths and gentle massage prior to expressing.
3. To encourage let-down reflex gently stroke or use circular movements with your fingertips to massage your breasts. Nipple rolling can stimulate the hormone needed for producing milk.
4. Feel your breast to find the right spot. This is usually about two to three centimetres behind your nipple.
5. Cup the breast with one hand making a 'C' shape with your thumb and fingers.

6. Gently squeeze your breast and then release the pressure. Find and build a rhythm. Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin. Milk should start to appear. Because colostrum is concentrated it is thick and will come drop by drop.
7. If the milk does not flow, try moving your fingers to a slightly different position. Find the spot that works best for you.
8. Keep your hands in one position until the milk flow stops. Move your hands around to a different position to make sure that all lobes are drained.

Storing your colostrum

Colostrum can be collected and stored in the same syringe each day but store in the fridge between use. At the end of the expressing day the colostrum can be frozen in a plastic bag. Label with your name, date of birth and date of expressing.

Please remember to bring your stored colostrum when you leave for the maternity unit to deliver your baby. Place the plastic bag of syringes in a cool bag with an ice block for the journey and give to a member of staff on arrival. The syringes can be stored in the neonatal unit freezer until needed.

Further information:

www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly (follow link to resources, audio visual)



Image from UNICEF Baby Friendly

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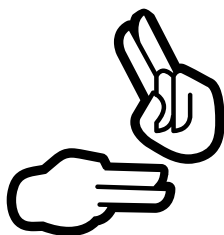
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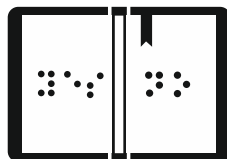
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