

Information for Antenatal expressing



Introduction

Your early breast milk is known as colostrum and that is the word that will be used within this booklet. Antenatal expressing is when you collect your colostrum during your pregnancy.

This booklet gives you important information about expressing your own colostrum before your baby is born.

What is colostrum?

During your pregnancy, your breasts will start to produce breast milk (the exact timing of this varies from person to person). The first breast milk your body makes is known as colostrum. Colostrum is the perfect source of nutrition for your baby because it:

- contains antibodies which protect your baby from infection and help their immune system to develop
- helps your baby's digestive system to develop, which protects your baby from allergies
- encourages your baby to open their bowels and pass 'meconium' (your baby's first black sticky poo) which reduces their risk of jaundice.

Colostrum is very concentrated. At birth, your baby's stomach is about the size of a marble, so they will only need a small amount of colostrum to receive all the nutrients they need.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde 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 you and your baby.

Who can express antenatally?

Most pregnant women can express their colostrum from 36-37 weeks pregnant. Antenatal expressing is not always suitable for everyone so please discuss with your midwife before you start. However, it may be particularly beneficial for women who:

- have pre-existing diabetes or develop diabetes while you are pregnant (gestational diabetes)

- have breast hypoplasia (underdeveloped milk-producing breast tissue)
- are having a planned (elective) caesarean section
- have a history of breast surgery
- have taken certain medications during pregnancy for high blood pressure. Your doctor or midwife will advise if this applies to you.
- have had problems with breastfeeding after previous births
- have a strong family history of dairy intolerance
- have a strong family history of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- are having more than one baby
- have a body mass index (BMI) score of 35 or above
- have a hormonal disorder such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

In addition, it can be of benefit to your baby to collect and feed them your colostrum if:

- scans show they are small for their gestational age
- they have been diagnosed with cleft palate/lip
- they are going to have a planned admission to the neonatal unit after birth
- they have any congenital conditions

How often can I express?

From 36-37 weeks of pregnancy, you can start collecting your colostrum 1-2 times a day building up to 5 times per day. This should be by hand expressing only for around 5 minutes each time. Breast pumps should not be used antenatally.

How much colostrum will I get?

The amount of colostrum you get will vary from nothing to a few drops leading up to a teaspoon. This small amount is perfect for your baby as colostrum is very concentrated in nutrients and antibodies to kick start your baby's immune system. Mature milk is not produced until around 3 to 5 days after the birth of your baby.

What equipment will I need?

An expressing pack will be given to you by your midwife. It will contain the following items: -

- 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?

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.

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

How do I store my expressed colostrum at home?

- Colostrum can be stored in the fridge or the freezer
- A new syringe should be used for each expression
- Ensure a cap is placed on the end of the syringe following expression
- Each syringe should be labelled using the label provided
- The syringe should be placed in a freezer bag and the bag sealed
- All your stored syringes, for each 24 hour period, should be stored in the same 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 -18°C or below.

When should I take my colostrum to hospital?

You should bring in a small amount of your stored colostrum (1 or 2 syringes) when you come in for the birth of your baby (e.g. when you are in labour or come in for planned caesarean section). If you are being induced wait until nearer when your baby is going to be born to bring it in. After your baby is born more can be brought in from home as needed to save any waste.

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. It will be safely stored in a fridge or freezer until it's needed. If it is frozen, defrost it in the fridge. Only defrost small amounts as needed to reduce wastage. Once defrosted, colostrum should be used within 24 hours or discarded.

When is the colostrum used?

If your baby breastfeeds successfully following their 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.

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.

Useful Information

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

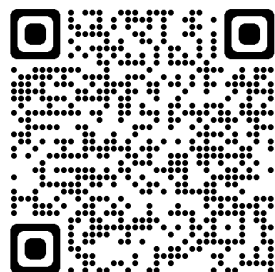


[UNICEF BFI Hand-expressing](#)



[Breastfeeding Network: Expressing and storing breastmilk](#)

Feeding your baby:



[Getting started | Parent Club](#)

Acknowledgements

Ante natal colostrum harvesting bundle 2022

Scottish Infant feeding Advisors network (SIFAN): Guidance on Antenatal Colostrum harvesting (2018)

NHS Fife Antenatal expressing information for patients for permission to use their leaflet