

Expressing first breast milk (colostrum) from 36 weeks of pregnancy for when your baby is born

Maternity Services

Information for Patients

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This leaflet is to help you understand why you might want to collect colostrum, (first breast milk) from 36 weeks of your pregnancy up until your baby is born. If after reading this leaflet you still have questions, please speak to your community midwife who will be able to answer your questions. If needed the community midwife can ask the Infant Feeding Team to talk to you as well.

Expressing means squeezing colostrum from your breast so it can be used later.

What is colostrum?

- Colostrum is the first breast milk. You start making it from about 16 weeks of pregnancy.
- It can be a golden yellow, white or clear colour and is often thick and very sticky.
- It is easy for your baby to digest, it is the perfect first food for your baby.
- It gives perfect nutrition specifically for your new-born baby and can help with keeping their blood sugar at the right levels.
- It has infection-fighting antibodies which helps your baby's immune system and helps them to fight infection.
- It is made in small amounts but has all the energy your baby needs in the first few days and it helps with the early passing of baby's first poo (meconium) which will help to reduce the risk of jaundice (yellow skin colour).

Why express and store your colostrum while you are pregnant?

- Breast milk is the recommended food for all babies, but especially for babies who may

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be at risk of being poorly at birth.

- Expressing and storing colostrum before birth, may mean your baby does not need to be given infant formula after birth.
- Expressing can help get breastfeeding off to a good start.
- Getting familiar with handling your breasts in pregnancy by expressing can help you to feel more comfortable with breastfeeding after your baby is born.

Who should think about collecting colostrum before their baby is born?

- Collecting colostrum before your baby is born can be helpful if your baby may have challenges with breastfeeding or maintaining their blood sugar levels in their early days.

This might be because your baby:

- is large or small for how far you are into your pregnancy
- you are expecting twins or triplets or more babies
- has a cleft lip or palate
- has a heart or other diagnosed condition.

It might be useful for you if you:

- are diabetic or have developed diabetes in pregnancy
- are taking beta-blocker medication for raised blood pressure
- plan to have a caesarean birth
- have had breast surgery
- have other reasons identified by you or your health care provider.

It is useful to learn the skill of hand expression, so that if you are unexpectedly separated from your baby, they can have some of your colostrum immediately.

Breastfeeding and diabetes

- Research shows that babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop childhood diabetes.
- Mothers who have diabetes may want avoid giving their baby formula milk if at all possible until the baby is at least 6 months old. Babies of women with diabetes may have low blood sugar in the first few hours after birth and may need a little extra milk to correct this.
- Early and frequent feeds will be encouraged to help prevent your baby becoming unwell.
- If you have already expressed some of your colostrum it can be given to your baby, if extra milk is needed, and this will help to avoid giving your baby formula milk should they need extra feeds.
- If you have diabetes and are insulin dependent, you may find that your insulin requirements are

lower when you are breastfeeding and that you need to eat more.

- If you developed diabetes while you were pregnant, research has shown that you are less likely to go on to develop diabetes in later life if you breastfeed your baby. .
- If you have any concerns that you may not be able to breastfeed please discuss this with your midwife or ask to talk to the Specialist Infant Feeding Midwife or Specialist Infant Feeding NNU Nurse.

When and how often can I express?

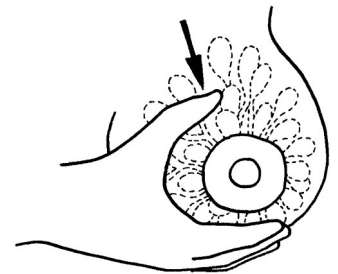
You can start to express from week 36 of your pregnancy for 2 to 5 minutes at a time, 2 to 3 times a day. Gradually increase to up to 5 to 10 minutes, 2 to 5 times a day, if you want to.

Colostrum is made in quite small amounts so you may get only a drop or two to start with; this should increase over the days as you express more. A baby only needs very small amounts of colostrum during the early feeds so any amount you collect is useful. Sometimes you cannot express any colostrum which is normal for some people, when the baby is born you should still be able to breastfeed. Please ask your midwife for further support if you are worried about the amount of colostrum you are able to collect.

How to express your colostrum

Hand expressing colostrum simply means gently squeezing milk out of your breast using your hand. It should not be painful either before, during or after expressing. The following tips may help:

- Start by washing your hands and keep everything as clean as possible
- Get comfortable and try to feel relaxed.
- It may be helpful to shower or have a bath before expressing to warm your breast tissue. Alternatively you can use some warm cloths applied to your breasts and *gently* massage your breast prior to expressing as a way of stimulating the flow of colostrum
- Place finger and thumb about 2.5 cm from the base nipple in a C shape.
- Using forefinger and thumb compress in a steady rhythm without sliding fingers along the skin, colostrum may take a few minutes to flow, if colostrum doesn't flow move fingers slightly up or down the breast and try again.
- When colostrum is forming small beads or dripping easily, collect the colostrum either into a clean container, such as small cup, (keep it just for expressing into) or by sucking it up directly into the colostrum collector by putting the tip of colostrum collector onto your nipple into the colostrum and pulling back on the plunger.
- As the flow of colostrum slows down or stops move your fingers around your breast 2.5cm from the base of the nipple. Swap to the other breast when the flow slows down or after 2 to 5 minutes.
- You can express from each breast 2 times during each expressing session. Colostrum can be collected 2 to 5 times each day in the same colostrum collector. You will need to put the little



cap that came with the colostrum collector back onto the tip and store in the fridge between uses.

Please Note: You may find that when you express, you feel your tummy going hard and relaxing. These are called 'Braxton Hicks' contractions. Do not worry about these, unless they begin to feel like regular period type cramps or mild labour contractions. **This is rare, but if this happens, you should stop expressing and rest.** If they continue and you are concerned please phone the Maternity Assessment Centre (MAU) LRI 0116 258 6312 or LGH 0116 258 4808

How to store expressed colostrum

The colostrum collector needs to be labelled with your name, the date and time you expressed. You can store your colostrum in the fridge at a temperature of 2 to 4°C and keep adding to it for up to 24 hours. After 24 hours, you should place the collector in a clean zip-lock bag and place in your freezer at a temperature of -18°C. This will keep for up to 3 months.

When to bring your colostrum into hospital

- If you are sure you are in labour or are having a planned caesarean, please bring 2 or 3 of the frozen colostrum in collectors (labelled with the time you took it **out** of the freezer as well as the date you expressed and your name) with you in a cool bag with ice bricks to keep it as frozen as possible. Once the stored colostrum has thawed in the fridge, it must be used within 24 hours but should remain chilled at all times. If it is thawed at room temperature it needs to be used within 12 hours or thrown away.
- If you are having an induction of labour please leave your colostrum at home in your freezer until you know you are in labour, then ask your birthing partner to bring it into the hospital. Please let the midwife caring for you know if you have brought colostrum with you as soon as you arrive and she will arrange for it to be stored in the correct fridge.

What happens when my baby is born?

- Having your baby in skin to skin contact in the first 1 to 2 hours following birth, including caesarean births if possible, will help encourage your baby to feed.
- Staff will support you to breastfeed and keeping your baby in skin to skin as much as possible will help your baby find your breast to feed.
- If your baby is having difficulties or is uninterested in breastfeeding at this time you will be encouraged (and assisted if necessary) to express some colostrum to give to your baby. You may also use any colostrum you have brought into hospital with you.
- If your baby continues to have issues with feeding at the breast or their blood sugar levels become a concern, your midwife or paediatrician will advise you on further treatment and feeding.

More information

www.babyfriendly.org.uk

www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/from-bump-to-breastfeeding

www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk

For other organisations that can give basic breastfeeding advice please see

NHS Choices 'Breastfeeding Help and Support'

www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-help-and-support/ for a list of websites and helplines

Helplines:

National Breastfeeding Helpline	0300 100 0212
Association of Breastfeeding Mothers	0300 330 5453
La Leche League	0345 120 2918
National Childbirth Trust (NCT)	0300 330 0700

If after reading this leaflet you still have questions, please speak to your community midwife who will be able to answer your questions. If needed the community midwife can ask the Infant Feeding Team to talk to you as well.

Please note:

Expressing colostrum while you are pregnant should **not** be done if you have had:

- A threatened/actual premature (early) labour
- Cervical weakness
- Cervical stitch to stop your cervix opening up
- Any bleeding in this pregnancy

If you have any of these things but would still like to express your colostrum while pregnant, please talk to your consultant about any risks that might be involved to see it might be possible for you.

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