

Patient Information



Milton Keynes
University Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

**Women's and
Children's Health**

**Expressing Colostrum
Antenatally**

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Foundation Trust
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Getting off to the best start

The first milk your breasts produce is called colostrum. This is produced from about sixteen weeks of pregnancy onwards and your breasts may leak colostrum from 28 weeks. This is not an indicator of whether there will be enough for the baby. The amount of colostrum will vary from woman to woman. It can range from nothing initially, to a few drops, progressing to a teaspoonful or more.

Learning to express colostrum can increase confidence and ability to breastfeed, especially in situations where the first feed may be delayed, high risk pregnancies and other special situations for example:

- Women with diabetes
- Multiple pregnancy (twins or triplets)
- Women with breast abnormalities or previous breast surgery
- Women with pregnancy induced high blood pressure and /or taking blood pressure medication
- Previous negative experience/difficulty with breast feeding
- Planned caesarean/induced birth especially if your baby is going to be born early
- Babies who are thought to be small or are expected to be under 2.5kg at birth

Any woman can hand express her milk from 36 weeks of pregnancy (from 32 weeks if they are likely to have a premature baby)

Why is colostrum important?

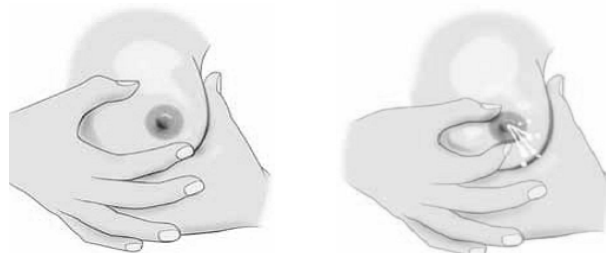
Colostrum contains important antibodies and nutrients for a newborn baby; it is high in carbohydrates and protein but low in fat, and will help the baby pass his or her first stools, which is important to prevent jaundice (a common and usually harmless condition in newborn babies that causes yellowing of the skin and the whites of their eyes).

The antibodies contained in colostrum serve as an immunisation, allowing the mother to pass on immunity to her baby from many germs that could otherwise harm him or her. There is a much higher concentration of these antibodies in colostrum than there is in mature breast milk. It contains nutrients that newborns need for healthy brain, heart, and central nervous system development. Colostrum is also very high in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants and it comes in perfect small quantities for newborn babies. It is also perfectly designed to line your baby's gut and be absorbed, laying the groundwork for future healthy development and proper digestion.

Research also shows that colostrum helps to stabilise blood sugar levels in babies which is very helpful particularly in those babies of mothers who had diabetes in pregnancy.

How to express milk by hand

1. Have a clean sterilised container to hand before you start. Ensure you are comfortable, and then gently massage your breasts for at least 2 minutes.
2. Cup your breast and feel back from the end of the nipple to where the texture of your breast feels different.
3. Using your thumb and the rest of your fingers in a C shape, gently squeeze this area – this shouldn't hurt.
4. Release the pressure and then repeat again and again, building up a rhythm. Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin. At first, only drops will appear, but just keep going as it will help build up your supply. With practice and a little more time, milk will flow freely.
5. When the flow slows down, move your fingers round to try a different section of your breast and repeat. When that flow slows down, swap to the other breast. Keep changing breasts until the milk is dripping very slowly or stops altogether.
6. If the milk doesn't flow, try moving your fingers slightly towards the nipple or further away, and try a gentle breast massage.



How often can I express and what do I need?

Before you have your baby and in the first few days after only hand express. Colostrum is thick and concentrated and comes out in small drops, so gets lost in pump equipment. Also in pregnancy stimulating your nipples can cause 'Braxton Hicks' tightenings so gentle stimulation gradually building up to 4-5 times daily for about 10 minutes is the best way. You could practise in the bath or shower as warmth often helps with expressing. It is very normal to get nothing initially, even learning how to hand express will get you off to a great start for when you have your baby. Don't worry about the tightenings unless they start to feel like period type cramps/mild labour contractions. This is rare, but if this happens stop expressing and rest. If they don't stop and you think you may be in early labour, you should call the delivery suite and discuss with the midwives.

All you need is yourself, some 1ml sterile oral syringes and bungs (ask your midwife), sticky labels (it is important to label the syringes with your name date and time you expressed) and a freezer/fridge. Breast milk can be stored in the fridge for up to 5 days at 4°C or lower (usually at the back, never in the door). It can be stored for 2 weeks in the ice compartment of a fridge or for up to 6 months in a freezer. Any breast milk expressed antenatally should be stored in the freezer.

Don't forget to bring your stored milk when in labour

Bring your stored colostrum with you in a cool bag with ice packs for storage in the milk fridge. Please ensure it is labelled with your name date and time you expressed and froze it. Ask your community midwife or Infant Feeding Specialist to provide you with oral syringes and bungs and/or sterile expressed milk containers to store your milk.

We ask information about you so that you can receive proper care and treatment. This information remains confidential and is stored securely by the Trust in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

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