

## Information for Mothers-to-be

# Antenatal Expression of Colostrum

**This factsheet aims to be a useful introduction to colostrum collection. You can also talk to your midwife or health visitor who will be able to answer any questions you may have.**

### Colostrum:

This is the first milk produced. It's a yellow sticky substance which is rich in antibodies and high in protein, vitamins and minerals in a very concentrated form. At birth, a 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. Even one feed of colostrum is valuable for mother and baby health. It is the ultimate first food, especially produced by a mother for her own baby:

- Antibodies coat the gut lining, protecting baby from germs and the absorption of proteins that can cause allergies.
- The anti-infective proteins provide the first immunisation against bacteria present in the birth canal and in the baby's new environment.
- It loosens extra mucous babies have at birth and acts as a laxative to help clear the gut of meconium (the first dark stools) and this helps to prevent jaundice developing.

Hand expressing in pregnancy can be a great tool for you to prepare for breastfeeding providing you with practice of how to hand express and confidence about how your breasts work. However, if you do not wish to express please rest assured that it is not vital to successful breastfeeding. Also, if you try hand expressing but do not obtain any colostrum this does not mean your body is not producing any, nor does it mean your body won't be able to produce enough breast milk for your baby after birth.

### Colostrum Collection

During your pregnancy, your breasts will start to produce colostrum (the exact timing varies from person to person). You can collect and freeze this milk during the last few weeks of your pregnancy. This is known as 'colostrum collection'.

It is recommended to express antenatally by hand rather than use an electric or manual breast pump because colostrum is produced in small quantities and can easily stick to the pump parts and be harder to collect. Also, a pump at this stage may feel more uncomfortable than gentle hands.

## Why do it?

Collecting your colostrum will be especially beneficial for your baby if they are likely to have difficulties with feeding or maintaining their blood sugar levels during the first few days after birth.

These include babies:

- Whose mother had diabetes during pregnancy or who has a history of diabetes.
- With a cleft lip or palate identified during pregnancy.
- With a congenital condition e.g. Down's syndrome or a heart complication
- Diagnosed to be large or small for their gestational age
- Whose mother is taking beta blockers to control high blood pressure
- Who are twins or triplets.

Discuss antenatal expressing with your midwife or health visitor. They will explain how to hand express and store your colostrum and provide you with free syringes. It is important to use this opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

## Is it safe?

The oxytocin hormone released when expressing can stimulate the uterus to contract, but opinions differ on whether expressing colostrum antenatally is likely to induce labour.

You may be advised not to collect your colostrum if you:

- have a cervical suture (stitches) in place
- have experienced premature labour in the past
- have had contractions, vaginal bleeding and/or premature rupture of membranes (your waters breaking early) during this pregnancy

## How to start colostrum collection

If you would like to collect your colostrum, you can start hand expressing for a few minutes once a day when you are 36 to 37 weeks pregnant. Gradually build up to gently expressing two to three times a day, and then as often as necessary in the first few days after you give birth. If your baby is premature or unwell, you will be encouraged to start expressing within two hours of giving birth. You can collect your colostrum while you're pregnant by hand expressing in the same way that you will express milk when your baby is born.

**Technique:** These instructions are a guide but the best way to learn is to practice (perhaps in the bath) so that you find out what works for you. It is important to wash your hands before you express and that the milk you collect is stored in a sterilised container to keep it germ free. More information on sterilisation methods can be found here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/sterilising-bottles/>

## To encourage your milk to flow:

- Try to be as comfortable and relaxed as possible. Sitting in a quiet room with a warm drink may help.
- Try to have an image of your baby in your thoughts.
- Have a warm bath or shower before expressing or apply warm flannels to your breasts.
- Gently massage your breast. This can be done with your fingertips or by rolling your closed fist over your breast towards the nipple. Work around the whole breast, including underneath. Do not slide your fingers along your breast as this can damage the skin.
- After massaging your breast gently roll your nipple between your first finger and thumb. This encourages the release of hormones, which stimulate your breast to produce and release the milk.

As you get used to expressing your milk, you will find that you do not need to prepare so carefully. It gets easier with practice.

## Now you are ready to start expressing:

Watch a video on Hand Expressing:

<http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/>

- Cup the breast and feel back from the end of the nipple to where the texture of the breast feels different.
- Using thumb and the rest of the fingers in a C shape gently squeeze this area – this shouldn't hurt.
- Release the pressure and then repeat again and again, building up a rhythm. Avoid sliding fingers over the skin.
- You may see a drop of milk gather at one of the openings in the nipple. You can collect the milk with the plastic nozzle of a syringe or into a sterilised container.
- When the flow slows down, move fingers around to try a different section of the breast and repeat.
- When the flow stops, express from the other breast.
- If the milk doesn't flow, try moving the fingers slightly towards the nipple or further away, or try a gentle breast massage.

## How much breast milk will I get?

The amount of breast milk you get will vary from a few drops to a teaspoon. This small amount is perfect for your baby as first breast milk (colostrum) is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby fight infections.

For more information and diagrams the following link takes you to “Off to the best start leaflet” <http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Parents/Resources/Resources-for-parents/Off-to-the-best-start/>

## Care of expressed colostrum:

- Label the syringe or container with your name and the date and time you expressed the colostrum.
- Put the syringe or container in a clean re-sealable bag and place it in your freezer at a temperature of -18°C.
- You can store your milk in the back of the fridge at a temperature of 2-4°C for up to 24 hours before you freeze it.
- Fresh breast milk that has only been stored in the fridge must be used within five days.
- Breast milk that has been frozen can be defrosted in the fridge. It must be used within 24 hours.
- You can express and freeze your colostrum at home and bring it into hospital when you have your baby.

## To bring your colostrum into hospital you will need:

- re-sealable food bags
- a small cool bag
- ice blocks

## Feeding your baby with colostrum

Some new-born babies are unable to feed well at the breast and others are unable to maintain the necessary blood glucose levels. In these situations, you can feed your baby with your colostrum. The syringe of colostrum will need to be brought to room temperature. You could immerse a plastic bag containing the syringe of colostrum in a bowl of warm water or place it next to your skin. Your midwife will show you how to feed your baby with a syringe or a small cup. Having a small feed will give your baby energy and increase their blood sugar levels. It often encourages babies to breastfeed well.

## For More Information

**National breastfeeding helpline:** 0300 100 0212

[www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk](http://www.nationalbreastfeedinghelpline.org.uk)

**Breastfeeding network**

[www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk)

**NCT Breastfeeding Line:** 0300 3300 0771 [www.nct.org.uk](http://www.nct.org.uk)

**La Leche League:** 0345 120 2918 [www.laleche.org.uk](http://www.laleche.org.uk)

For women who would like general support in their own locality, please ask your midwife or health visitor for a leaflet or contact:

**Kirklees Breastfeeding Support:** 0300 304 5555

**Calderdale: Locala Supporting Families:** 0300 304 5076 to speak to a duty health visitor in Calderdale Mon - Fri 08.30 - 20.00

Calderdale and Huddersfield Breastfeeding Clinic is run by a Lactation Consultant/Specialist Midwives and Breastfeeding Peer Supporters. Please ring 01484 344345

**Calderdale Breastfeeding Peer Support Network:** 07920 466660

For more urgent feeding problems please ring:

**Calderdale Birth Centre:** 01422 224417

## Useful websites

**Start4life:** 0300 123 1021

[www.nhs.uk/start4life](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life)

**Caring for your baby at night:**

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/sleep-and-night-time-resources/%20caring-for-your-baby-at-night/>

**Best Beginnings:** <https://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/>

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Marilyn Rogers  
Infant Feeding Advisor  
Calderdale Royal Hospital

marilyn.ROGERS@cht.nhs.uk

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਵਿਭਾਗ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

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برائے مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

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المذكور أعلاه"