

Patient Information Sheet:

Expressing Colostrum — before the birth of your baby

Introduction

Colostrum is the very best first food for your newborn baby. It is rich in calories and antibodies to protect your baby, and is also a natural laxative to encourage the passage of meconium (the first poo!). In some instances it is good to have a ready supply of extra colostrum available to give to your baby after they are born.

Why Might it be Recommended to do this?

It is undesirable for your newly born baby to receive artificial infant formula (unless medically indicated) as it is associated with generating an autoimmune or allergic response.

There are several situations where your baby may need extra calories after birth or may have difficulty feeding, or some women might not be able to provide enough milk in the first few days. Some of these situations are:

- Maternal diabetes or gestational diabetes – baby is at risk of low blood sugar levels after birth and may need extra milk
- Maternal Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) – leading to delayed lactation
- Maternal breast surgery – leading to nerve damage, blockages or not enough milk making breast tissue e.g. breast reduction
- Maternal breast hypoplasia (lack of breast development)
- Any maternal illness that may mean your baby cannot feed from you soon after birth
- Any condition in the unborn baby that will possibly cause difficulty feeding from you after they are born, e.g. cleft lip and/or palate, or require surgery as soon as they are born
- Planned elective caesarean section – sometimes a baby may develop breathing problems and need extra calories to maintain energy levels
- Unborn babies whose growth has been restricted and they are small for their gestation. These babies are often induced to be born earlier than their due date.
- Unborn babies who have a family history of inflammatory bowel conditions such as Crohn's disease or Ulcerative Colitis, where introduction of artificial infant formula is least desirable

There is no evidence that expressing colostrum during pregnancy will cause premature labour, however if expressing does cause cramping abdominal pains you will need to stop and try again later — if cramping pains still occur please discuss this with a midwife.

Please speak to the midwife or your doctor if you would like more information

Advantages for your baby.

- Colostrum will be readily available after the birth
- No unnecessary introduction of artificial infant formula
- Blood sugar levels will be maintained
- Helps protect your baby from infections
- Reduced risk of developing allergic / autoimmune responses to artificial infant formula
- A greater opportunity to breastfeed

Advantages for you.

- Increase your awareness of how your breasts work
- Increase your confidence with breastfeeding
- Become very good at hand expressing your milk
- Encourages a good supply of colostrum
- Establish and maintain a good milk supply in most cases
- Promotes a close bond with your baby

How to do it!

Hand Expressing

Expressing is the term we use for squeezing or milking the breast to obtain colostrum or breast milk.

Every breastfeeding woman should learn and practice the art of expressing their milk by hand – it can be done anywhere and any time.

Equipment needed:

syringes and sterile containers supplied by the hospital Midwives.

Colostrum is produced from 16 weeks of pregnancy up until a couple of days after the birth of your baby. It is normal to find it hard to express much to start with – you may only get a few drops or sometimes none at all.

Start expressing from 34 to 36 weeks onward, beginning twice a day. Results may be slow at first but with practice you will soon develop your own successful technique and your supply will increase. The frequency of expressing may be increased to 3 or 4 times per day after a few days if no abdominal pains occur.

Please speak to the midwife or your doctor if you would like more information



Here are some helpful hints to get you started:

- Choose a warm and private environment, and a comfortable chair – sitting upright is best.
- Always wash your hands before you start!
- Expressing after a nice warm bath or shower makes it easier.
- Stroke your breast gently toward the nipple – this will help you relax and aid the milk flow.
- Place the pads of your thumb and forefinger on opposite sides of the areola approximately 2—3 cms from the base of the nipple. Then start squeezing gently and rhythmically deep in behind the nipple. Some women find it helpful to press in toward their chest wall, then squeeze moving away from the chest wall.
- Using the syringe provided, collect your milk by drawing it up into the syringe. If you have lots of colostrum you can express into a small sterilized cup or bowl instead e.g. a medicine cup, and then draw it up into the syringe or pour it into the container to freeze.
- Move your thumb and forefinger around to other sides of the areola to help empty all milk available. Gentle massage toward the nipple will help bring milk down to the nipple.
- Avoid sliding your fingers across the skin as this can lead to skin burns, and avoid squeezing the breast too hard as this can cause pain and bruising.
- Express both breasts twice at each session, approximately 5 minutes each side.



Please speak to the midwife or your doctor if you would like more information

Storage of the colostrum

Your colostrum will need to be frozen until you come in to hospital to have your baby.

Colostrum collected over one to two days can be kept in the same syringe in the refrigerator, i.e. the same syringe can be used at each expressing. The colostrum you have collected can then be frozen in the syringe or in the container provided. (Keep frozen syringes in a sealed plastic bag). You can add chilled colostrum to the already frozen colostrum in the container if you wish.

Please make sure you write your name and the date of the first expression on the syringe or container.

What to do when in hospital.

Bring your frozen colostrum with you in a container with an ice pack. Give the colostrum to the midwife and ensure it is labeled with your name, then placed in the refrigerator or freezer.

After the birth, breastfeed your baby as soon as you are able and when your baby becomes interested. Keeping your baby in skin to skin contact with you will encourage your baby to feed. Ask for assistance from the midwife if you are having any difficulty. Please check your baby is well attached to your breast whilst feeding. If it is required, a top up feed of your colostrum may be given. The midwife will help you with this when or if needed.

References:

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Cairns Health Service District. April 2005. Antenatal Expression of Colostrum for Mothers with Diabetes and Other Mothers Whose Babies Are Likely to Have Feeding Difficulties. (Protocol) Queensland Government, Queensland Health.

Renfrew, M., Fisher, C., Arms, S. 1990. *Breastfeeding: Getting Breastfeeding Right for You*. Celestial Arts.

Please speak to the midwife or your doctor if you would like more information