

Fact Sheet

Hand expression of colostrum during pregnancy

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Colostrum is:

- milk produced by the breast during pregnancy and is perfect for your baby
- thicker and more yellow in colour than breast milk and contains more proteins
- high in proteins, which help to protect your baby against infection
- high in energy (kilojoules)
- easily digested and helps with baby's first poo.

Why should I express antenatally?

- Human milk is recommended for all babies.
- Colostrum is available to feed to your baby after birth if your baby is unable to breastfeed.
- To get breastfeeding off to a great start.

Situations where antenatal expressing and storing of milk may be beneficial:

- babies with cleft lip and/or palate
- diabetes in pregnancy- as some babies will need to go to the nursery for blood sugar level monitoring
- women with breast hypoplasia (reduced breast development)
- women with polycystic ovarian disease
- women who have had breast surgery e.g. a breast reduction.

If you have experienced bleeding, contractions or other complications before 36 weeks of pregnancy, it is important to discuss hand expressing with your midwife or doctor before you start.

When can I start expressing?

- You may start expressing after 36 weeks of pregnancy.
- Start with 3-5 minutes on each breast 2-3 times a day.
- STOP expressing if you are having abdominal cramping (contractions) at the same time.

The amount of colostrum expressed will vary between women. It may take a few attempts before drops of colostrum appear.

What else happens after the birth of my baby to get breastfeeding off to a great start?

- Uninterrupted skin-to-skin contact for 1-2 hours following birth if the baby is breathing well.
- Breastfeeding is encouraged and unrestricted.

Link to hand expressing video clip via Global Health Media:

<https://globalhealthmedia.org/portfolio-items/expressing-the-first-milk/>

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How to hand express & store colostrum



- Wash your hands.
- Apply warmth to breast – to help your milk (colostrum) to flow.
- Gently stroke your breast towards the nipple to help your milk (colostrum) to flow.
- Place your hand on your breast as in the picture above.
- Gently press your fingers and thumb together and hold for a few seconds.
- Avoid dragging your fingers on your skin, squeezing or pinching your nipple.
- Repeat the action about once every second or so.
- Colostrum may flow slowly as it is thick.
- When the colostrum starts to drip easily collect in a clean small plastic container with a secure fitting lid (BPA free).
- Be sure to rotate the position of your fingers around the areola to ensure that you express more than one area of your breast.
- Repeat on your other breast after 5 minutes or when the flow slows down.

How do I store my colostrum?

- Containers of colostrum need to be labelled with
 - your name,
 - your medical record number,
 - date and time of expressing.
- Small plastic containers (BPA free) can be purchased from your local pharmacy or supermarket.
- Colostrum should be collected in a new container each time you express. This is so that small amounts of colostrum are available for your baby and not wasted.
- If using syringes to collect your colostrum, place the cap on the syringe and store in a snap/zip lock bag in the freezer.
- Place the container of your expressed colostrum in the freezer.
- Frozen colostrum can be stored for up to 3 months in the freezer.
- Once defrosted, (DO NOT defrost in microwave) colostrum must be fed to the baby within 24 hours. Discard any unused colostrum after this time.
- Bring no more than 60mls of your expressed colostrum with you when you come to hospital to birth. Store the containers in a small-insulated bag with an ice-brick. Do not use ice cubes.
- Inform your Midwife upon arrival that you have expressed colostrum available.

Expressing should not cause breast pain. Please contact your health professional if you experience pain whilst expressing or you need support.

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**We welcome further feedback on this brochure
as a way of continually improving our service.**

Send your feedback to:
WSLHD-Get_Involved@health.nsw.gov.au

References

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