

Fact sheet

Hand expression of colostrum during pregnancy

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Colostrum is:

- produced by the breast during pregnancy-**the first milk.**
- thicker and more yellow in colour than breast milk.
- high in proteins, which protect baby from infection.
- high in energy (kilojoules).
- easily digested and helps baby pass the first poo.

Situations where antenatal expressing and storing colostrum may be helpful:

- Health conditions during pregnancy, such as diabetes- baby may be separated from mother and go to the nursery.
- women who have had a consultation with a lactation consultant during pregnancy because of breast hypoplasia (reduced breast development), polycystic ovarian disease.

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?

- after 36 weeks of pregnancy.
- **Express 3-5 minutes on each breast 2-3 times a day.**
- STOP expressing if you are experiencing abdominal cramping (contractions) at the same time.

The amount of colostrum expressed differs for each woman and is not a sign of how much milk you will make for your baby. It may take a few tries before you see some drops.

After the baby's birth...

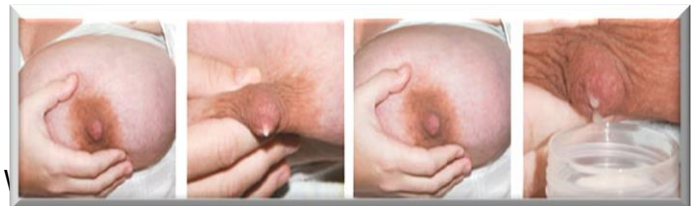
If your baby is breathing well after birth, they will be placed in skin-to-skin contact with you on your chest. Your baby will stay there until after they have finished their first breastfeed. This may take up to 2 hours.

If baby does not latch and breastfeed at this time, it is important that you are supported to hand express your colostrum. Baby can then be fed the colostrum that you expressed during pregnancy with a spoon, cup or fed by the midwife with a gloved finger.

The colostrum that you expressed at this time can be stored in a refrigerator used for storing breast milk and fed to baby at the next feed time-if needed.

Expressing should not cause breast pain. Please contact a midwife if you have concerns about expressing.

Hand expression.



- Apply warmth to breast – to help your colostrum flow.
- Gently stroke your breast towards the nipple to help your colostrum 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. Repeat the action about once every second or so.

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- Avoid dragging your fingers on your skin, squeezing or pinching your nipple.
- When the colostrum starts to drip, collect in a clean small plastic container with a secure fitting lid (BPA free). Colostrum may flow slowly as it is thick.
- Rotate the position of your fingers around the areola to ensure that you reach all areas of your breast.
- Repeat on your other breast after 5 minutes or when the flow slows down.
- Watch Global Health Media, How to express the first milk by scanning the QR code below: - <https://globalhealthmedia.org/videos/how-to-express-your-first-milk/>



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
- Plastic containers with lids (used for small amounts of liquid) - can be purchased from the supermarket.
- The same container may be used for each expression during the same day. Place the container on the top shelf of the fridge between expressions.
- If you are expressing more than 5mls at one time, store colostrum in separate containers. This is so that small amounts of colostrum are available for your baby and not wasted.

- Store expressed colostrum in the freezer. If using syringes, place the cap on the syringe and store in a snap/zip lock bag.
- Frozen colostrum can be stored for up to 3 months in the freezer and fed to baby during this time.
- Once defrosted, (DO NOT defrost in microwave) it must be fed to baby within 24 hours. Discard any unused colostrum after this time.
- Bring around 30mls of your expressed colostrum with you to hospital unless your midwife tells you otherwise. 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.

References

- Forster, D. et.al (2017) Advising women with diabetes to express breastmilk in late pregnancy (DAME: a multi-centre randomised controlled trial). The Lancet, vol. 389, issue 10085

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

Send your feedback to:

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