Antenatal expression of colostrum



What is Colostrum?

- Colostrum is the fluid produced by the breast at the end of pregnancy and in the first few days after the birth of your baby.
- It is the ideal first food for your baby.
- It is thicker and more yellow in colour than mature breast milk and it has a higher content of proteins, many of which are immunoglobulins which help the baby's immunity, fat-soluble vitamins and some minerals.
- It is high in energy, is easily digested in newborn baby's stomach and helps with the passage of meconium (the baby's first bowel actions).

Why should I express antenatally?

- Human milk is the recommended food for all babies.
- Expressing and storing colostrum before the birth of your baby may reduce the risk of your baby being given infant formula after birth.
- It can promote successful, exclusive breastfeeding from birth.

Situations where antenatal expressing may be beneficial are for:

- Babies with growth restriction in pregnancy.
- Babies with a diagnosed cleft lip and/or palate.
- Babies with diagnosed congenital conditions (e.g. cardiac conditions).
- Established premature labour where birth expected to proceed please check with your doctor.
- Women with diabetes in pregnancy.
- Women with breast hypoplasia (reduced breast development).
- Women with polycystic ovarian disease.
- Women who have had breast surgery e.g. a breast reduction.

What happens after the birth of my baby?

- Uninterrupted skin to skin contact with your baby for 1-2 hours following birth is recommended if the baby is well.
- Breastfeeding should be encouraged and unrestricted.
- If your baby has feeding difficulties or requires extra milk you may express some colostrum and give it to you baby or use some of the colostrum you have expressed antenatally.
- If your baby has ongoing feeding issues or blood sugar control problems you should be guided by the advice of the Paediatrician.

When can I start expressing?

You should discuss this with your midwife or doctor.

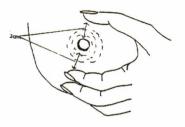
- You may start expressing after 36 weeks of pregnancy.
- Start with 3-5 minutes on each breast 2-3 times a day.
- STOP expressing if you are having contractions at the same time.

Do NOT express if

- You have a history or are currently having problems with threatened or actual premature labour.
- You have cervical incompetence.
- You have a stitch in your cervix to help prevent preterm labour.

How to hand express & store colostrum

Expressing should not be painful. Please contact the maternity unit if you experience pain whilst expressing or you need any support.





- Wash your hands.
- Apply warmth to breast this helps your milk (colostrum) to flow.
- Gently stroke the breast towards the nipple to stimulate the let-down reflex.
- Place your hand underneath the breast, with your finger one side of the areola and your thumb on the other.
- Gently press the fingers and thumb pads (not fingertips) back towards the chest wall into the breast tissue, then press them together and hold for a few seconds.
- The fingers should be well back from the nipple and should not drag on your breast.
- Don't squeeze or pinch the nipple.
- Repeat the action in a rhythm similar to a baby's sucking about once every second or so.
- It is normal for colostrum to flow slowly due to its thick consistency. When the colostrum starts to drip easily, start collecting it in a syringe or small plastic container with a secure fitting lid(BPA free).
- When milk ceases to flow, rotate the position of the fingers and thumb around the areola and repeat the expressing action.
- Swap to the other breast when flow slows down.
- · Use both breasts at least twice each session.
- Colostrum can be collected 2-3 times on the same day and stored in the same syringe. The syringe should be refrigerated between expressions.
- At the end of each collecting day the expressing container / syringe holding the colostrum can be frozen
 in a zip lock bag. Ensure it is labelled with your name, your medical record number and the date of
 expressing.
- The frozen colostrum can be stored for 3 months in the freezer or 6-12 months in a deep freezer.
- Bring your frozen colostrum when you come to hospital to give birth and staff will discuss storage with
 you. The amount women express varies, so please talk to your midwife about how much to bring with
 you for the early feeds. Once the colostrum has defrosted it needs to be fed to the baby within 24 hours
 or otherwise discarded.
- Your partner can take the colostrum to the postnatal ward to be placed in Antenatally Expressed Breast Milk Fridge. It must be placed in a labelled container for safety.

References:

- Cox (2010) An ethical dilemma: Should recommending antenatal Expressing and storage of colostrum continue? Breastfeeding Review 18(3) 5-7
- Forster et al (2011) Diabetes and antenatal milk expressing: A pilot project to inform the development of a randomised control trial Midwifery 27(2) 209-214
- Singh et al (2009) Effect of antenatal Expression of Breast Milk at Term in Reducing Breast Feeding Failures MJAFI 65:131-133