

Information about antenatal hand expression for pregnant women

What is colostrum?

Colostrum is the very first milk that your body makes for your baby. You will have some in your breasts from about 20 weeks of pregnancy. Colostrum is easily digested and full of proteins, vitamins and minerals that give a boost to your baby's immune system and help prevent or treat low blood sugar. Colostrum also helps the passing of meconium (the baby's first bowel movement), which also assists in preventing jaundice.

Antenatal hand expression is when a pregnant woman expresses the colostrum from her breasts before her baby is born and freezes it for use after birth. If you choose to do this you can bring your frozen colostrum into Bath Birth Centre with you and we will store it until your baby needs it. Hand expressing your colostrum and freezing it just in case you need it when your baby is born can be a very helpful thing to do for the following reasons:

- You have some extra milk to give your baby if s/he needs some while you are learning to breastfeed. This is particularly helpful if you have a baby who is at increased risk of low blood sugar after birth (your midwife will have told you if this is the case).
- If there is a reason that you suspect breastfeeding may be difficult for you, for example if you have had breast reduction surgery or previously had a baby who lost a lot of weight after birth hand expressing early like this will give you confidence and may help your milk supply .

We recommend you start hand expressing at 36 weeks (not before), although if your breasts leak colostrum you can collect it (using breast shells¹) and store it in the same way. Do it once a day from 36 weeks and then three times a day from 37 weeks.

Your midwife will show you the technique of hand expressing.

¹ **Breast shells** are hollow, lightweight plastic disks worn inside the [bra](#).

Here are some tips:

Be warm and relaxed – you will have more success if you feel safe and comfortable. Practise in the bath or shower.

Preparation

First, wash your hands thoroughly – use hot, soapy water, and clean between your fingers and up to your wrists

Each time, use a fresh, clean towel to dry your hands

Use a sterile syringe or small clean container such as an egg cup to collect the colostrum

Sit somewhere comfortable, where you won't be interrupted

Breast massage first

Massage around your breasts to stimulate the colostrum to flow, using gentle fingertip strokes.

Positioning your fingers

Make your first finger and thumb into the shape of the letter C and place them on either side of the areola (the darker part around your nipple), with the nipple centred between them

Your finger and thumb should be about 1 ½" (3-4cms) away from the base of the nipple (this varies a little from person to person)



Expressing

Push your finger and thumb backwards, into the breast, towards your ribs

Squeeze your finger and thumb together behind the nipple, slowly to begin with until you see a drop of colostrum coming out. You may need to do this quite a few times before tiny drops of colostrum appear

You need to be quite firm but it should not hurt

If nothing comes massage gently and try again, perhaps after your next bath or shower.

If it is uncomfortable or if, after a few squeezes, nothing comes out move your fingers forwards or backwards a little bit but still keeping the nipple centred between them. Sometimes it takes a few tries before you find the right spot.

When the flow slows down, reposition your fingers again, clockwise or anti clockwise so you squeeze into another area of your breast.

If you find it difficult to collect the drops in the syringe then express into a small clean container and then draw the milk up into the syringe. Hold the container right against your breast, between your nipple and the finger below your breast, and the colostrum will flow into this.

There is also very good information on this website:

<http://www.gestationaldiabetes.co.uk/colostrum-harvesting/>

If you need help then please contact your community midwife

We will give you some syringes and labels. It is important that you label every syringe.

When collecting colostrum, if small amounts are obtained, this can be collected on the same day and stored in the same syringe. But only mix cold colostrum with cold. Never mix warm, freshly expressed colostrum with the cold colostrum from the fridge. The syringe or small container with colostrum in it should be kept at the back of the fridge between uses. At the end of the collection day, place in a sealed plastic bag, label correctly with the name and date of expressing and time of freezing, then freeze. If you need more syringes and labels contact your community midwife

Bringing your colostrum into the birth centre

Bring your colostrum into Bath Birth Centre at the Royal United Hospital Bath in a cool bag with a freezer block. Tell your midwife you have it with you and she will arrange for it to go straight in the fridge freezer in the neonatal unit. If you have lots of syringes full of colostrum you only need to bring a few. When you arrive tell your midwife you have it with you and she will check the labels, store it safely and tell you where it has been put.

Giving your baby your colostrum

After birth we will encourage you and your baby to have a long period of skin-to-skin contact. This is very calming for you both and is the best start to breastfeeding. Usually your baby will have a good first feed within the first hour or so after birth. We will then support you to feed your baby at the breast whenever your baby shows feeding cues. If your baby needs your extra colostrum we will

Information about antenatal hand expression for pregnant women

help you to give it to your baby as part of a feeding plan that we have agreed with you. Two members of staff will check that the milk you give is yours.

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG
01225 428331 www.ruh.nhs.uk

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.PatientAdviceandLiaisonService@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656.