



The Mid Yorkshire Hospitals
NHS Trust

Harvesting and storing your colostrum (first milk)

This information leaflet explains the process of harvesting and storing your colostrum or first milk in preparation for your baby's first feeds.

Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust is committed to promoting and supporting breastfeeding as the healthiest way to feed your baby. Breastfeeding is a unique interaction between mother and baby which not only feeds and comforts, but also helps prevent against infection and disease.

It is well known that exclusive breastfeeding (that means your baby has your milk and nothing else to eat or drink) for the first 6 months has many proven health benefits.

Who may need to express antenatally?

Any mother can express her breast milk from 36-37 weeks of pregnancy. It is particularly useful if you have been told that your baby is at an increased risk of having a low blood sugar in the first few hours after birth or there may be a difficulty feeding.

Reasons for this can include:

- Women with diabetes in pregnancy (pre-existing or gestational);
- Infants diagnosed during the antenatal period with cleft lip and/or palate;
- Infants diagnosed with congenital conditions;
- Mothers having an elective caesarean section;
- Infants diagnosed as small for gestational age;
- Women with breast hypoplasia;
- Women with hormonal disorder (e.g. Polycystic ovary syndrome);

- Women who have had breast surgery;
- Women with multiple sclerosis;
- Strong family history of dairy intolerance or inflammatory bowel disease;
- Mothers taking beta blockers (e.g. labetalol);
- Mothers with a BMI of 37 or above;
- Mothers expecting twins or triplets.

Can I breastfeed if I have Diabetes?

- Babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop childhood diabetes.
- It is thought that cows' milk (the main ingredient of formula milk) can trigger diabetes in some babies; this is probably more likely for your baby if you or your partner have diabetes. Therefore, it is very important that mothers who are diabetic avoid giving their baby formula milk if at all possible until the baby is at least 6 months old.
- If you have diabetes and are insulin dependent you may find that you need less insulin when you are breastfeeding and that you need to eat more.
- If you have gestational diabetes you are less likely to go on to develop diabetes in later life if you breastfeed your baby.

Contraindications

The antenatal expression of colostrum is contraindicated in the following circumstances:

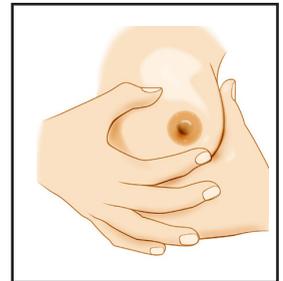
- History of threatened/ actual premature labour;
- Cervical incompetence;

- Cervical suture in situ;
- History of 2nd or 3rd trimester bleeding in this pregnancy.

How to hand express and store colostrum in the antenatal period?

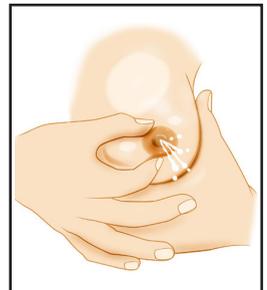
1. Start by making sure that your hands are clean and that you have a sterilised container or syringe.
2. Get comfortable, ensuring that you are as relaxed as possible. This will allow the hormones needed for milk 'let-down' to flow. These hormones are called Oxytocin and Prolactin.
3. To help the milk flow it can be useful to shower or have a bath before expressing; alternatively you can use some warm cloths and gentle massage prior to expressing.

4. Cup your breast with one hand making a 'C' shape with your thumb and the rest of your fingers approximately 2-3 cm back from the base of the nipple.



5. Gently squeeze or compress your breast and then release the pressure. Find your rhythm. Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin. Milk should start to flow.

Because the first milk (colostrum) is very concentrated, it is thick, and will come out of your breast drop by drop.



6. If the milk does not flow, try moving your fingers slightly towards the nipple or further away, find the spot that works best for you.
7. Keep your hands in one position until the milk flow slows. Then you should move your hands around to a different position, ensuring that all lobes are drained.
8. Aim to use both breasts in each session.
9. You can collect your colostrum 2-3 times a day, for 10 minutes.
10. Store you colostrum inside the syringe in a zip lock bag. Ensure your name, hospital number or date of birth are clearly marked on the bag, along with the date of expression. Place the syringe and bag into your freezer.

If you wish to see hand expressing on line please visit:
www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/

Storage

You can collect your colostrum 2-3 times on the same day and store in the same syringe. The end of the syringe should be capped off with the bung provided and kept in the back of the fridge between uses to a maximum temperature of 4°C. At the end of the day your colostrum should be frozen in a zip lock bag. Ensure that each bag is labelled with your name, hospital number and the expressing date. Syringes can be obtained from your midwife.

It can be stored in the freezer for:

- 2 weeks in a freezer compartment of a fridge;
- 6 months in the deep freeze (-18°C).

When you are coming into hospital bring 3-4 frozen syringes of colostrum with you. Once defrosted, colostrum must be used within 2 hours in hospital or 24 hours if you can store it in a fridge or cool bag with ice packs. Only defrosting small amounts at a time reduces the possibility of wastage. If your breast milk is frozen then the best way to transport it is in a cool bag with an ice pack alongside it. You should give your labelled expressed milk to the ward staff on admission for storage in the milk freezer on the Postnatal Ward. The staff will check your colostrum is clearly labelled with your name, hospital number and the date it was removed from the freezer. You should never re-freeze breast milk.

NOTE:

You may experience “Braxton Hicks” contractions when you express (your womb sometimes going hard then relaxing) - don’t worry about these, unless they begin to feel like period-type cramps or mild labour contractions. This is rare, but if it happens you should stop expressing and rest. If they don’t stop and you think you might be in early labour, you should telephone the Labour Ward for advice. There is currently no evidence that antenatal colostrum harvesting will increase your chances of going into labour early.

How often can I express?

You can express your milk as often as you want to but 2-3 times a day for 5-10 minutes should be adequate.

How much breast milk will I get?

The amount of breast milk you get will vary from a drop to a teaspoon. This small amount is perfect for your baby as first breast milk (colostrum) is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby fight infections. Do not be concerned if you are unable to express any milk as this does not mean that you will not be able to breastfeed. It takes practice so do keep trying and seek help.

Local help and support

If you need help with breastfeeding, you can contact your community midwife, infant feeding specialist, health visitor, a local breast feeding group or a breastfeeding helpline.

Further information

Professional Midwifery Advocates - 01924 541000

Infant Feeding Coordinator - 07824417802

We are committed to providing high quality care. If you have a suggestion, comment, complaint or appreciation about the care you have received, or if you need this leaflet in another format please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on: **01924 542972** or email: **myh-tr.palsmidyorks@nhs.net**

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Published Aug 2020
Review Date 2023



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