



Expressing colostrum

Learning to hand express, or harvest, your colostrum before birth is a great way to prepare for your breastfeeding journey. By expressing your colostrum towards the end of your pregnancy you will be able to ensure your baby gets the benefits of colostrum not matter how you choose to feed or what happens after birth.

SAFETY MESSAGE: Colostrum syringe caps **MUST BE REMOVED** before giving the milk to the baby as they can be a choking hazard. To avoid leaking, keep syringes flat until frozen and keep in the plastic packaging. Your midwife or maternity support worker can show you how to give your expressed colostrum to your baby.

Colostrum: First type of milk

Colostrum is the first milk you will produce and this is present from around 16 weeks of pregnancy. Colostrum is a concentrated, sticky, yellowish liquid which is easy to digest, helps to clear your baby's first poo (meconium), reduces jaundice, and is full of antibodies to help protect your baby from infection. It is small in quantity but is everything your baby needs in the first few days of life. If you have known risk factors (see below), we would strongly recommend harvesting colostrum antenatally, but it can be useful for anyone to try. You may like to store of colostrum in preparation for birth just in case you, or your baby, are unwell or separated following birth. Even without these issues, it is common for babies to take time to breastfeed efficiently. Having the colostrum in advance minimises the chance of any delay in a baby receiving your milk and the need for formula use. It also helps you to learn a valuable skill for managing future breastfeeding challenges and stimulates production of breastmilk..



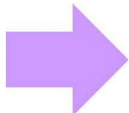

Strongly recommended from 36 weeks if you:

- Have gestational diabetes.
- Are receiving additional care or ultrasound scans due to the growth of your baby, large or small.
- Are taking Beta-blocker medication e.g. Labetalol.
- Have a planned Caesarean birth or an induced birth.
- Are expecting twins or multiples.
- Are anticipated to need Special Care admission.
- Your baby is expected to have cleft lip or palate.
- Have a family history of metabolic disorders e.g. MCADD.
- Have any other medical conditions where challenges are anticipated (please discuss with your healthcare professional).

However, you should **avoid** expressing if you are at immediate risk of pre-term labour.

How can I express my colostrum?

- You can express colostrum by hand from 36 weeks (or before if advised). Hand expressing in pregnancy can be a great tool for you to prepare for breastfeeding. However, if you do not wish to express, please rest assured that it is not vital to successful breastfeeding. Also, if you try hand expressing but do not obtain any colostrum this does not mean that there is anything wrong, nor does it mean your body won't be able to produce enough breast milk for your baby after birth. It is a good skill to start practising, as expressing within 2 hours of giving birth can help with milk production if you are separated from your baby. The image below shows some techniques for expressing – make sure you are relaxed. It can help to try after a warm bath or shower.

Colostrum	How to hand express
<p>Colostrum is rich and concentrated yellow liquid, small in quantity that acts like vital medicine for your baby born prematurely or unwell</p> <p>Colostrum is high in anti-infective and anti-viral properties and is important for priming and protecting your baby's delicate gut</p> <p>If your baby isn't with you (for example on the Neonatal Unit) it is important that you start hand expressing. This is recommended within 2 hours of birth to 'switch on' milk producing hormones and significantly boost milk production</p> <p>A good technique is important for stimulation and adequate removal of milk. Please let your Midwife/Midwifery Support Worker/Nurse/Infant Feeding Team know how we can best support you.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Key Points</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hand express within 2 hours of birth 2. Stimulate 8-10 times in 24 hours not leaving long gaps between expressing 3. Express at least once overnight </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  <p>If you don't take it, the breast won't make it</p> <p>If you don't use it, you lose it</p> </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>You may only get a few drops of milk your first few times or nothing at all Keep trying every few hours – stimulation is key</p> </div> <div style="display: flex;"> <div style="flex: 1;"> <p>Make sure you are in a comfortable position</p> <p>Massage your breast working from the top to the nipple</p> <p>Make a C shape with your thumb and fingers 2-3cm away from the base of the nipple</p> <p>Press fingers rhythmically, press and release</p> <p>Continue for a few minutes at a time, remember it takes time for the milk to flow. You may need to move your fingers further forward or further back to find the right spot</p> <p>Once the milk stops or slows down rotate your position to try a different section of your breast and repeat.</p> <p>Make sure you do both breasts</p> </div> <div style="flex: 1;">  </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  <div style="display: inline-block; text-align: left;"> <p>Helpful video link for hand expressing</p>  <p><small>youtu.be/K0zVCwdjZw0</small></p> </div> </div>

- Store your 'harvested colostrum' in a freezer in small sterile containers to bring in once your baby is born. For high risk cases the hospital can provide you with a small pot which you can freeze and add to in a layer effect. Store in your freezer, in a see-through bag, label with your full name, and date of birth and date of expression. Place the label **INSIDE** the plastic bag as labels can detach in the freezer. When you come into hospital, bring some in, in an insulated cool bag with ice packs, and let the midwives know so it can be placed in our freezer. It is crucial that it stays frozen as it will thaw quickly and we do not know when exactly you will need it! Remember to mention to staff that you have some colostrum if there are feeding challenges and use to supplement a reluctant or sleepy baby. Keep expressing if there are issues with the efficiency of breastfeeds as this maximises your future milk supply. Remember to take expressed milk home when you leave hospital, it is best to use this in the early days.

- If you are interested in expressing during pregnancy, please speak to your community midwife,
- Watch the RBH infant feeding class https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dtO0KvF_d30 and take a look at the other short videos so that you can build a relationship with your baby
- Read the 'Off to the best start' leaflet (<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/leaflets-and-posters/off-to-the-best-start/>)
- Take a look at these expressing videos to see the technique, please note this is breast milk and not colostrum being expressed - <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/video/hand-expression/>
- Global Health media <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axQi5PqRZ0M> (available in other languages)
- How to Express Your First Milk – Video – Global Health Media Project <https://globalhealthmedia.org/video/how-to-express-your-first-milk/> (available in other languages)

Contact information

For further information ask your community midwife, or contact our infant feeding advisors by emailing the infant feeding team rbft.infantfeedingteam@nhs.net

References

1. Ballarat Health Services (2010) The ante natal expression of colostrum Catalogue No 731074
2. Cox SG (2010) An ethical dilemma. Should recommending antenatal expressing and storing of colostrum's continue? Breastfeeding review 18 (3) 5 – 7.
3. NICE Guideline NG3 (Updated Dec 2020) <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng3>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Infant Feeding Team Lead, February 2015

Reviewed: December 2024

Next review due: December 2026

Our Maternity Strategy and Vision

'Working together with women, birthing people and families to offer compassionate, supportive care and informed choice; striving for equity and excellence in our maternity service.'

You can read our maternity strategy here

