

Expressing your milk before baby arrives

Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at ndht.pals@nhs.net.

Expressing your milk during the antenatal period

Northern Devon Health Care NHS Trust is committed to promoting and supporting breastfeeding as the healthiest way to feed your baby. We believe that breastfeeding should be recognised as 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 around the first 6 months has many health benefits.

For baby

- Protection against ear infections.
- Protection against chest infections and wheezing.
- Lower risk of diabetes.
- Protection against diarrhoea and stomach upsets.
- Lower risk of obesity.

For mother

- Lower risk of ovarian cancer.
- Lower risk of breast cancer.
- Stronger bones in later life (osteoporosis).
- Comfort your baby easily by breastfeeding.

Why should I express my milk antenatally?

Any expectant mother can express her breast milk from 36 to 37 weeks gestation. It is particularly useful if you know that your baby is at an increased risk of having low blood sugar in the first few hours after birth. This can include:

- Women with diabetes in pregnancy (pre-existing or gestational).
- Babies diagnosed during the antenatal period with cleft lip and/or palate and congenital conditions.
- Women having an elective caesarean section.
- Babies with intrauterine growth restriction.
- Twins/multiple pregnancy.
- Women taking beta blockers (e.g. labetalol) to control high blood pressure.
- Women who have a BMI > 35.
- Women who have a planned induction of labour.
- Women who have had breast surgery.
- Women with multiple sclerosis.
- Women with polycystic ovarian syndrome.
- Women with a strong family history of dairy intolerance or inflammatory bowel disease.
- Any woman that wants to

It is so helpful if you have already expressed some of your breast milk, so that if your baby does need extra milk, this can be given to them instead of formula milk. The ideal time to do this is before your baby is born.

Expressing before baby is born has a positive impact on a mother's milk supply and continued ability to breast feed.

Breastfeeding and 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 have diabetes 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.

When not to express antenatally

Antenatal expression of colostrum is not recommended in the following circumstances:

- History of threatened/ actual premature labour.
- Cervical incompetence/ cervical suture in situ.

How to express your breast milk

Hand expressing milk simply means squeezing milk out of your breast and this is how you do it:

Begin by washing your hands with warm soapy water.

1. Cup your breast with your hand and feel back from the end of the nipple to where the texture of your breast feels different.
2. Using your thumb and index finger firmly squeeze this area. It should not hurt.
3. Release the pressure then repeat again and again building up a rhythm. Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin.
4. Milk should start to come. The first milk, colostrum, is very concentrated. It is very thick and will come out of your breast drop by drop.
5. If the milk does not come, try moving your fingers slightly towards the nipple or slightly further away to find the spot that works best for you.
6. When the flow slows down move your fingers around the breast (like moving around the numbers on a clock face) so that you have expressed the milk from all the way around your breast.
7. Express from the other breast.
8. If you wish to see hand expressing video online, please visit www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/



How often can I express?

You can express your milk as often as you want to, but we would recommend 3 times a day. Express for as long as you feel comfortable. It can often take a short while for the colostrum to flow.

How much breast milk will I get?

The amount of breast milk you get will vary from a few drops to a tea spoon. This small amount is perfect for your baby as colostrum is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby fight infections. You may not get any colostrum initially and this is also normal; have a break and try again later.

You may find when you express you feel your womb going hard and then relaxing, these are braxton-hicks contractions. Do not 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 do not stop and you think you may be in early labour, you should telephone the delivery suite on the telephone number on the front of your notes as advised by your midwife (01271 322605/3).

How to store your expressed milk

You will need to collect the milk in clean containers. The midwife will provide you with small sterile syringes that you can use to store the colostrum in. Each syringe will need to be labelled with your name, date of birth and your NHS number and date and time you expressed.

An expressing pack, containing all you need to collect and store your colostrum can also be collected from your midwife or antenatal clinic.

It is best to store your colostrum immediately in a freezer.

If you are only able to express tiny amounts (less than 0.1ml) at a time, put this in the fridge and collect a full day's volume together and then place the labelled syringe in a freezer bag in the freezer.

Please write on the date and time you take it out of the freezer as it will need to be used within 48hours if thaws. When you are bringing your colostrum to hospital, transport in a freezer bag to ensure it remains frozen and then can be immediately transferred to our hospital freezer on arrival.

Remember tiny amounts are normal and colostrum is concentrated with protective factors. No medicine/nutrition can compare to it.

When you come to have your baby

Please remember to bring in some colostrum in an ice/freezer bag. Let your midwife know you have it with you and she will arrange for it to be stored in the freezer. If your colostrum has already thawed, it can only be stored in the hospital fridge for 24 hours.

Contacts/further information

If you require further information regarding the information in this leaflet, please contact the Infant Feeding Coordinator on Bassett ward on 01271 322612.

Videos:

Colostrum harvesting: <https://www.northdevonhealth.nhs.uk/services/maternity/infant-feeding/>

Online infant feeding workshop:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOwGGZB9p4k&feature=youtu.be>

References

www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression

<https://breastfeeding.support/expressing-colostrum-antenatally/>

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)31373-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)31373-9/fulltext)

Breastfeeding Answers Made Simple; A Guide for Helping Mothers, 2010, Nancy Mohrbacher IBCLC, FILCA

Colostrum harvesting/expressing your milk in the antenatal period, Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email ndht.pals@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at www.careopinion.org.uk.

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Raleigh Park, Barnstaple
Devon EX31 4JB
Tel. 01271 322577
www.royaldevon.nhs.uk

© Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
This leaflet was designed by the Communications Department.
Email: ndht.contactus@nhs.net