

## Antenatal hand expressing of breast milk

### Other formats

If you need this leaflet in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services) <mailto:rduh.pals@nhs.net>
- [rduh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals@nhs.net)

Colostrum is produced in women's breasts after about 16 weeks of pregnancy. This continues in your pregnancy in preparation for your baby's birth. This information leaflet will support you in expressing colostrum before you give birth to support your baby in the early hours after they are born.

### Who can antenatally express their colostrum?

Most women can safely express their colostrum antenatally. It is particularly recommended if you:

- have diabetes
- have raised blood pressure
- have a multiple pregnancy
- are expecting to give birth to a small baby

Babies of these mothers need frequent feeds in the first few days to protect them from low blood sugar levels (hypoglycaemia). We know that colostrum or breast milk is an excellent way of stabilising blood sugar - by providing even small amounts the chance of your baby developing diabetes in the future can be reduced. Colostrum also builds your baby's immune system, provides concentrated nutrition and helps establish a healthy gut by coating the intestines. Healthy, term babies who are an appropriate size for their gestation are not usually at risk of hypoglycaemia, unless they become unwell.

Other women who might benefit from expressing colostrum antenatally include those:

- at risk of premature birth
- planning to have an elective caesarean section or induction of labour

- who have polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
- with a raised BMI
- who have had previous breast surgery
- expecting a baby with a cleft lip / palate
- who have had a previous poor feeding experience.

However, it is not always appropriate for everybody so ongoing conversations with your care team are important to ensure that it is right for you - please speak to your midwife or obstetrician if you are unsure about whether you can hand express colostrum when pregnant. You may wish to hand express in pregnancy even if the above do not apply to you, however you do not have to; your body will still make milk when your baby is born.

## When should I start hand expressing?

You can start hand expressing from 36 weeks.

We suggest expressing at least once or twice a day between 36-37 weeks, and from 37 weeks you can build up to five to 10 minutes, two to five times a day.

Painless tightening might be felt but if you experience any uncomfortable cramping or contractions before 37 weeks it is important that you stop expressing. After 37 weeks you may wish to use hand expressing to encourage labour - if so, you may continue to encourage your contractions.

## Am I able to express before 36 weeks?

Women and pregnant people who are less than 36 weeks should only be encouraged to express when they are either in established labour or where a decision has been made to deliver the baby prematurely, with delivery expected within 24 hours. Attempts to express colostrum antenatally should not occur more than six hours before birth is expected unless agreed with the medical team.

## How do I hand express?

Your community midwife or antenatal team at the hospital will support you with the technique and provide you with syringes to collect the colostrum in. There are also videos available on the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly or Global Health Media website:



**UNICEF Hand expressing video**

[www.unicef.org/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/](http://www.unicef.org/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/)



**Global Health Media Hand expressing**

<https://globalhealthmedia.org/video/how-to-express-breastmilk>



**Global Health Media Expressing the first milk**

<https://globalhealthmedia.org/video/expressing-the-first-milk/>

## Storing and transporting expressed colostrum

Once you have expressed colostrum, it should be drawn up into clean, sterile syringes. These can be placed in a clean container and frozen as soon as possible. Please label each syringe with your **name**, as well as the **date and time** the colostrum was expressed.

Follow these storage guidelines:

- **Room temperature (up to 25°C):** Store for up to **four hours**.
- **Fridge (4°C or lower):** Store for up to **two days**.
- **Freezer (-18°C or lower):** Store for up to **six months**.

When you come to the hospital to have your baby, bring your **frozen colostrum in a clean container, surrounded by freezer blocks** to keep it frozen during transport. On arrival, it will be stored in one of our freezers until needed. Please make sure the colostrum remains frozen - if it defrosts on the way, it will need to be used immediately or discarded.

Don't worry if you get little or no colostrum, this is completely normal. Around one in four women who try hand expressing during pregnancy will collect very little or none at all. This does not affect your milk supply once your baby is born. If you're unsure whether you're expressing effectively, speak to your midwife or hospital team for support. You may find it becomes easier to express once your baby has arrived.

## Using your expressed colostrum

Any colostrum you collect can be given to your baby in combination with breastfeeding to reduce the risk of your baby having unstable blood sugars if they are at risk of low blood sugar, and can support you as you establish breastfeeding. Please collect any unused colostrum left in our freezers when you go home, which you may wish to use at home.

Your baby will be monitored closely and ongoing support with feeding your baby will be provided.

If you have any other questions please do not hesitate to contact your community midwife, the infant feeding coordinator or the diabetes in pregnancy team.

Infant feeding coordinator:

**01392 406663**

## References

Liu B, Jorm L, Banks E (2010) Parity, Breastfeeding and the Subsequent Risk of maternal Type 2 diabetes. *Diabetes Care*.

JG Alves, JN Figueiroa, J Meneses, and GV Alves. Breastfeeding Protects Against Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus: A Case-Sibling Study. *Breastfeed Med* 5 Aug 2011.

## Your notes

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### PALS

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- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
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Scan the QR code to visit the Care Opinion website →

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