

# Expressing first breast milk (colostrum) from 36 weeks of pregnancy for when your baby is born

Maternity Services

Information for Patients

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## Why save your first breast milk (colostrum)?

This leaflet explains why you might want to collect first breast milk your body makes (colostrum). You can collect from 36 weeks of your pregnancy until your baby is born. If you have any questions, please speak to your community midwife. They can also ask the Infant Feeding Team to talk to you as well.

**Expressing** means squeezing colostrum from your breast so it can be used later.

## What is colostrum?

- Colostrum is the first breast milk. You start making it from about 16 weeks of pregnancy.
- It can be a golden yellow, white or clear colour. It is often thick and very sticky.
- It is easy for your baby to digest.
- It is the perfect first food for your baby.
- It gives perfect nutrition specifically for your new-born baby. It can help with keeping their blood sugar at the right levels.
- It has infection-fighting antibodies. These help your baby's immune system. They help them to fight infection.
- It is made in small amounts but has all the energy your baby needs in the first few days.
- it helps with the early passing of baby's first poo (meconium). This will help to reduce the risk of jaundice (yellow skin colour).

Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

Visit [www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk) for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals  
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)

## Who should not express colostrum?

### Do not collect colostrum if you have

- a threatened/actual premature (early) labour
- cervical weakness
- any bleeding in this pregnancy
- you have a blood born infection that could infect your baby if you breastfeed

If you have any of these things but would still like to express your colostrum, please talk to your consultant. They can talk to you about any risks that might be involved. It might still be possible for you.

## Why should I collect my colostrum?

- Breast milk is the best food for all babies. It is very good for babies who may be at risk of being poorly at birth.
- Your baby may not need to be given infant formula after birth.
- Expressing can help get breastfeeding off to a good start.
- Practicing expressing during pregnancy can help you feel confident breastfeeding later.

## Who should think about collecting colostrum?

- Most mothers are able collect colostrum while they are pregnant. You may wish to try.
- Collecting colostrum before your baby is born can be very helpful if your baby may have trouble with breastfeeding.
- It can help your baby keep their blood sugar at the right levels in their early days.

Your baby might need the extra colostrum if

- your baby is large or small for how far you are into your pregnancy
- you are expecting twins or triplets or more babies
- your baby has a cleft lip or palate
- your baby has a heart or other diagnosed condition.

It might be useful for you if you

- are diabetic or have developed diabetes in pregnancy
- are taking beta-blocker medication for raised blood pressure
- plan to have a caesarean birth
- have had breast surgery
- have other reasons found by you or your health care provider.

It is useful to learn how to express by hand. If you are unexpectedly separated from your baby,

they can have some of your colostrum right away.

## Breastfeeding and diabetes

- Studies show that babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop childhood diabetes.
- If you are diabetic you may want to avoid giving your baby formula milk, if at all possible, until the baby is at least 6 months old. Babies of women with diabetes may have low blood sugar in the first few hours after birth. They may need a little extra milk to correct this.
- We encourage early and frequent feeds. It will help stop your baby becoming unwell.
- If you have already expressed some of your colostrum it can be given to your baby. If extra milk feeds are needed, this will help to avoid giving your baby formula milk.
- If you have diabetes and are insulin dependent, you may find that your insulin needs are lower when you are breastfeeding. You may need to eat more.
- If you developed diabetes while you were pregnant, studies have shown that you are less likely to go on to develop diabetes in later life if you breastfeed your baby.
- If you have any concerns that you may not be able to breastfeed please talk to your midwife. You can also ask to talk to one of the Specialist Infant Feeding Midwives.

## When and how often can I express?

You can start to express from week 36 of your pregnancy for 2 to 5 minutes at a time, 2 to 3 times a day. Slowly increase to up to 5 to 10 minutes, 2 to 5 times a day, if you want to.

Collect into a sterile container. There are a few different types of oral syringe or silicone collectors you can buy.

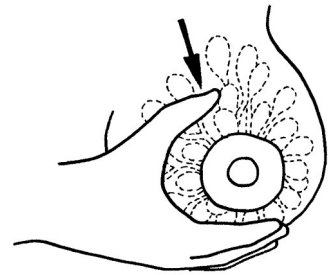
Colostrum is made in quite small amounts. You may get only 1 or 2 drops to start with. This should increase over the days as you express more. A baby only needs very small amounts of colostrum during the early feeds. Any amount you collect is useful. Sometimes you cannot express any colostrum. This is normal for some people. When your baby is born, you should still be able to breastfeed. Please ask your midwife for more support if you are worried about the amount of colostrum you are able to collect.

## How to express your colostrum

Hand expressing colostrum simply means gently squeezing milk out of your breast using your hand. It should not be painful either before, during or after expressing. The following tips may help:

- Start by washing your hands. Keep everything as clean as possible
- Get comfortable and try to feel relaxed.
- Having a shower or a bath before expressing can help. It can warm your breast tissue. You can also use some warm cloths applied to your breasts. **Gently** massage your breast before expressing. This can help to stimulate the flow of colostrum

- Place finger and thumb about 2.5 cm from the base nipple in a C shape.
- Press gently in a steady rhythm without sliding fingers along the skin. The colostrum may take a few minutes to flow. If colostrum does not flow move your fingers slightly up or down the breast and try again.
- When colostrum is forming small beads or dripping easily, collect the colostrum. You can use either a clean container, such as small cup, (keep it just for expressing into) or by sucking it up directly into the colostrum collector/oral syringe. You can do this by putting the tip of colostrum collector onto your nipple into the colostrum. Pull back on the plunger. If you have different type of colostrum collector you will put the tip of the collector into the colostrum on your nipple. Gently squeeze the collector to suck up the colostrum.
- As the flow of colostrum slows down or stops, move your fingers around your breast 2.5cm from the base of the nipple. Then try again. Swap to the other breast when the flow slows down or after 2 to 5 minutes.
- You can express from each breast 2 times during each expressing session. Colostrum can be collected 2 to 5 times each day in the same colostrum collector.



**Please Note:** You may find that when you express, you feel your tummy going hard and relaxing. These are called '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 this happens, you should stop expressing and rest.** If they continue and you are concerned please phone the Maternity Assessment Centre (MAU) 0116 258 6111

## How to store expressed colostrum

- Label the colostrum collector with your name, the date and time you expressed.
- You can store your colostrum in the fridge at a temperature of 2 to 4°C. You can keep adding to it for up to 24 hours.
- After 24 hours, put the collector in a clean zip-lock bag or small plastic container and freeze it. It will keep for up to 3 months. But you will probably want to use it before your baby is that old as this is the first milk.
- If you are collecting colostrum for a premature baby do not store for longer than 3 months.

## When to bring your colostrum into hospital

- If you are in labour or are having a planned caesarean, please bring some of the frozen colostrum in collectors.
- It needs to be labelled with the date and time you took it **out** of the freezer. It also needs the date you expressed and your name.
- Place the collectors in a small plastic container. Put it in a cool bag with ice bricks to keep it as frozen as possible.

- The colostrum should be stored in the fridge when you get to hospital.
- Once thawed, use it within 24 hours if kept in the fridge or 4 hours at room temperature. It should be thrown away after that.
- If you are having an induction of labour please leave your colostrum at home in your freezer. Your birthing partner can bring it to hospital when labour starts.
- Please let the midwife caring for you know you have brought colostrum with you as soon as you arrive. She will arrange for it to be stored in the correct fridge or freezer.

## What happens when my baby is born?

- Skin-to-skin contact with your baby after birth helps them start feeding
- Staff will support you to breastfeed and to keep your baby in skin to skin as much as possible. This will help your baby to find your breast to feed.
- If your baby struggles to breastfeed, staff can help you express colostrum or use the colostrum you've brought
- If your baby's blood sugar is low or they have feeding issues, your midwife or doctor will guide you

## Helplines:

National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers 0300 330 5453

La Leche League 0345 120 2918

National Childbirth Trust (NCT) 0300 330 0700

## More information

[www.babyfriendly.org.uk](http://www.babyfriendly.org.uk) going to Unicef is that right? <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/>

[www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/from-bump-to-breastfeeding](http://www.bestbeginnings.org.uk/from-bump-to-breastfeeding)

[www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk)

<https://healthforunder5s.co.uk/sections/pregnancy/how-youll-feed-your-baby/>

For other organisations that can give basic breastfeeding advice please see

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/breastfeeding-and-bottle-feeding/breastfeeding/help-and-support/>

[www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-help-and-support/](http://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-help-and-support/) for a list of websites and helplines

Please speak to your community midwife who if you have any questions after reading this leaflet. The community midwife can ask the Infant Feeding Team to talk to you as well.

## Space for notes:

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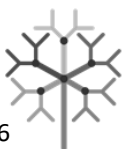
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اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل  
જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।  
Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk](mailto:equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk)



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