

# Information about antenatal hand expressing

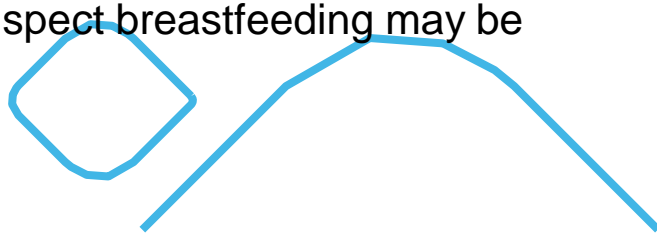


## What is colostrum?

- Colostrum is the very first milk that your body makes for your baby. You will have some in your breasts from about 20 weeks of pregnancy. Colostrum is easily digested and full of proteins, vitamins and minerals that give a boost to your baby's immune system and help prevent or treat low blood sugar. Colostrum also helps the passing of meconium (the baby's first bowel movement), which also assists in preventing jaundice.

'Antenatal hand expression' is when a pregnant woman manually expresses the colostrum from her breasts before her baby is born and freezes it for use after the birth. If you choose to do this you can bring your frozen colostrum into Bath Birth Centre with you and we will store it until your baby needs it. Hand expressing your colostrum and freezing it during pregnancy is highly recommended for most women for the following reasons:

- You have some extra milk to give your baby if s/he needs some whilst you are learning to breastfeed. This is particularly helpful if you have a baby who is at increased risk of low blood sugar after birth (your midwife will have told you if this is the case).
- If there is a reason that you suspect breastfeeding may be



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difficult for you, for example if you have had breast reduction surgery or previously had a baby who lost a lot of weight after birth, hand expressing during pregnancy will give you confidence and may help your milk supply.

- We recommend you start hand expressing at 36 weeks (not before unless you have been specifically advised to do so in special circumstances), although if your breasts leak colostrum you can collect it (*using breast shells as pictured below in Image 1*) and store it in the same way. Aim to express it once a day from 36 weeks and then three to five times daily from 37 weeks.



Easy Way Baby

Image 1; 'Breast shells'

## How to hand express

- Your midwife will show you the technique of hand expressing but there are also some helpful guides available online, we have included some examples here:

- <https://abm.me.uk/breastfeeding-information/antenatal-expression-colostrum/>
- <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/>
- <https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-info/hand-expressing/>

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## Useful Tips

### Preparation:

- Begin by washing your hands thoroughly – use hot soapy water, clean between your fingers and under jewelry, up to your wrists
- Use a clean towel to thoroughly dry your hands
- Use a sterile syringe for collecting your colostrum and mark with the date/time of first opening
- Find somewhere comfortable and relaxing where you will not be interrupted

### Massage and positioning of your fingers:

- Gently massage your breasts to stimulate the colostrum to flow. Use gentle fingertip strokes
- Form a 'C' shape with your thumb and forefinger and place them either side of your areola (the darker part around your nipple) with the nipple in the centre
- Your finger and thumb should be around 3-4cm from the base of the nipple but this will vary from person to person (*see Image 2 below*)



*Image 2: positioning of fingers for hand expressing*

### Expressing:

- Push your finger and thumb backwards into the breast, towards your ribs

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- Squeeze your finger and thumb together behind the nipple, slowly to begin with until you see a drop of colostrum coming out. You may need to do this a few times, adjusting your fingers slightly until you see colostrum
  - Firm pressure is often needed but it should not hurt. If you don't see any colostrum try massaging your breast gently again. Some people find it easier just after a warm bath or shower.
  - If you experience discomfort or you don't see colostrum, try moving your fingers forwards or backwards, keeping the nipple centered between them.
  - If you see colostrum but then the flow slows, reposition your fingers and move clockwise or anti-clockwise around your breast until it starts again.
  - Collect the colostrum in a sterile syringe (you can continue adding to the same syringe for 48 hours so long as it is refrigerated between collections and is dated from the first collection you do).


## Storage and bringing in to hospital

- Your colostrum can be stored in a fridge at temperature 2-4°C for up to 48 hours whilst you continue adding to the same syringe.
- After this the syringe should be placed in a freezer safe bag and placed in a freezer at -18°C.
- If coming into hospital to birth your baby please bring your colostrum in a named cool-bag in order that it remains frozen and staff can store it securely in the designated freezer for you.

Further information around expressing and storing your colostrum can be found here:

<https://www.laleche.org.uk/antenatal-expression-of-colostrum/>

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital.

Email [ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656.

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