



Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting

A 'How To' guide

Why antenatal colostrum harvesting is beneficial?

Antenatal colostrum harvesting is the act of expressing early breastmilk (colostrum) before your baby is born. We recommend that you begin after you are 36 weeks pregnant, and it can be done from 3-5 times a day.

For some mothers, it can be a useful tool that helps ensure their baby will start life without the need for formula supplementation. The importance of exclusive breastfeeding for all babies has been well-established by scientific research.

Colostrum contains vital immunological properties and helps to colonise the baby's gut with healthy bacteria that protect against allergy and disease. It also contains the perfect balance of proteins, fats and micronutrients needed for human babies as well as acting as a laxative to help the passing of the first tarry meconium stools.

Some babies may experience difficulties with feeding or maintaining their blood sugar levels during the first few days after birth and therefore may require supplementary feeds.

Women who may find this beneficial are:

- Those with Type 1 & Type 2 diabetes or gestational Diabetes
- Who are expecting twins or more
- Have a high body mass index
- Are expecting a baby that has been identified on scan as being small or large
- Anyone who wants to breast feed

You should have had a chance to discuss your plans to express antenatally with your midwife. In some instances it may not be recommended to express antenatally if:

- You have a history of threatened or actual preterm labour
- You have a history of cervical incompetence or if you have had a suture put in your cervix to prevent preterm labour.

It is preferable to express antenatally by hand rather than use an electric or manual breast pump. This is because the colostrum will be produced in quite small quantities and can easily stick to the



bottles or pump parts and be harder to collect. If you hand express and use a syringe to draw up the individual drips of colostrum, you can then use these syringes for storage prior to birth.

How to hand express

Colostrum is very thick and sticky; the best receptacle is into a syringe or a sterile pot:

- Start off by washing your hands and have the equipment (comfortable pillow, syringes/cups and labels) ready near you
- Gently massage your breasts whilst thinking about/talking to their unborn baby, this will stimulate your brain to produce oxytocin which is important in ejecting the colostrum from your breast
- Making a C shape with your thumb and index/middle finger and place opposite each other on the breast just behind the nipple (thumb on top and finger at bottom) gently move backwards about 2-3cms from the base of your nipple.
- Gently squeeze and release the area (this should not be painful).
- Repeat this building up the rhythm, and avoid sliding your fingers over the skin.
- Repeat the action until colostrum starts appearing at the nipple, it will only be small droplets at first
- Catch the droplets in either the syringe or sterile pot
- When the flow of colostrum slows, rotate the thumb and finger around the areola and repeat
- The key is patience and persistence – colostrum may not appear straight away or on the first attempt, but regular attempts 3-5 times a day for 10-20 minutes will eventually pay off. It is important not to become frustrated as this can inhibit the flow of your oxytocin.
- Always label the syringe/pots with name and date expressed
- Antenatal harvesting will not impede or affect supply once baby is delivered

The following video is a good visual guide for the technique (**please note that the woman expressing in the video has mature milk not colostrum, your amounts will be different**).

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/video/hand-expression/>



(use your camera phone to scan square and access the video quickly)

Storage of your colostrum

Syringes/pots can be stored in labelled 'food' bags that have the following information: Name, Date of Birth and the Date/time of collection (if taking colostrum into hospital).

Colostrum/ breast milk can be stored in the fridge for up to six days at a temperature of 2-4 degrees. In the freezer, Colostrum /breast milk can be stored for up to 6 months.

When transferring from home to the hospital (for example) bring the stored milk in their packets in a cool bag with ice packs surrounding them, to keep frozen until ready to defrost

Use of frozen breast milk

If defrosted in the fridge the colostrum needs to be used within 24 hours. If defrosted outside of the fridge then it needs to be used immediately.

When you arrive at the hospital please let your midwife know that you have colostrum available and she will be able to store it appropriately.

Once you have given birth your baby may or may not need your colostrum. Not using your colostrum is not a waste, effective breastfeeding is the goal. Please ensure that you remember to ask for your colostrum stores back before you leave the hospital.

Other resources

<https://abm.me.uk/expressing-milk-baby-arrives-antenatal-expression-colostrum/>

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

<https://www.gestationaldiabetes.co.uk/colostrum-harvesting/>

Contact us

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You can also ask a member of staff to contact PALS on your behalf.

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