

## Maternity

# Diabetes and breastfeeding your baby

This leaflet will help to answer some of your questions about how diabetes may affect the breastfeeding of your baby.

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire promotes breastfeeding as the healthiest way to feed your baby. We make sure that every diabetic mother has a chance to speak with their midwife about feeding their baby.

You do not have to make any decision about how to feed your baby whilst pregnant. During your discussion on feeding, your midwife will go through a birth plan - this is an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

## Can I breastfeed if I have diabetes?

You can breastfeed your baby, and breastfeeding brings many benefits to you and your baby.

Added benefits of breastfeeding include:

- It lowers the risk of gestational diabetes, which can lead to diabetes in later life
- Breastfeeding lowers the risk of your baby developing diabetes - formula milk has an ingredient which can trigger diabetes in babies
- It makes it easier for you to control your blood glucose levels after the birth of your baby
- It helps you to lose weight between pregnancies
- The fluid your breasts produce in the first few days after birth, known as colostrum, helps stabilize your baby's blood sugar



### **Getting ready to breastfeed**

- Take good care of yourself - eat healthily during pregnancy and stay active to help your baby be healthy
- The midwives will speak with you about how to monitor your glucose levels when you are breastfeeding
- If you have type 1 diabetes, antenatal clinic staff will discuss your night-time insulin doses, calorie needs and snacks before each breastfeed
- You can learn how to express colostrum in case your baby doesn't want to breastfeed straight away or needs extra milk

**Once baby is born, there are ways you can help to keep your baby's blood sugar level stable.**

### **Skin to skin and what this means for you and your baby**

Keeping your baby in uninterrupted skin to skin contact for as long as you wish for the first feed, and in the early days no matter which method of feeding you choose will increase your milk supply.

Being placed close to you on your chest will help your baby feel safe and secure, held close in your arms, recognising your voice, your smell and your heartbeat. This calm, warm environment prevents baby's blood sugar from dropping due to the stress of separation, getting cold or crying.

Having your baby close helps you to recognise signs that your baby wants to breastfeed and helps to keep your baby warm.

### **Feeding cues**

- Sucking movements of tongue and hand
- Licking lips
- Hand to mouth movements
- Wriggling
- Small sounds

## Patient Information

### **Feed soon and often**

A side effect of your diabetes is that in the hours after birth your baby's blood sugar level can fall. Your baby needs to be fed within the first hour of birth and then frequently - at least every 2-3 hours as a minimum.

It is important to feed baby according to the above feeding cues, so this may mean more breastfeeds than you anticipate. This could be up to 12 times a day. This is usual and will help your milk supply to establish.

Your baby's blood sugar needs to be checked before the second and third feed. Your baby will be safest and happiest closest to you, but if the blood sugar levels drop, your baby may need to be cared for in the neonatal unit for a short time.

### **Avoid giving your baby formula milk**

- Having colostrum available in case your baby needs a top up will help to avoid the need to give any formula milk
- Feeding your baby with entirely your own milk either by breastfeeding or expressing will help you to establish a good milk supply so your baby has enough milk
- You will be more confident about breastfeeding through practice

### **What is colostrum?**

Colostrum is the first yellow coloured milk that mothers produce for their baby's first feeds after birth.

Some mothers find that they leak colostrum whilst they are pregnant and others may not. If you haven't noticed any colostrum leakage, don't worry. This does not mean that you will not be able to produce enough milk for your baby.

## **Antenatal expression of colostrum**

Babies are often sleepy in the first couple of days after birth. Giving baby your colostrum in the early days will help to stabilize your baby's blood sugar. and If breastfeeding is delayed or you aren't able to breastfeed, you can give your colostrum.

Expressing colostrum before birth means you can build your supply and freeze it, ready to bring into the hospital. Diabetes can be a risk factor for a delay in 'milk coming in', but through regular expression, skin to skin contact and responsive breastfeeding, you can help to establish your milk supply.

Colostrum can be given to your baby in the hospital by healthcare professionals either by cup or syringe. You can discuss this further at the antenatal clinic or with your community midwife.

Your midwife can give you the equipment you need store colostrum safely in the fridge/freezer until your baby is born.

## **Is it safe to hand express colostrum before my baby is born?**

There is currently no evidence to suggest that there are any dangers with hand expression after 37 weeks, before your baby is born.

## **What if my baby is born early and I didn't have a chance to express any colostrum?**

If your baby decides to be born a little sooner than expected and you did not have time to express colostrum, speak to your midwife about collecting colostrum in the early stages of labour.

## **When and how often can I express?**

You can start to express colostrum from week 37 of your pregnancy, for no more than 3-5 minutes at one time, 2 to 3 times a day.

### **How to express your colostrum**

Hand expressing means gently squeezing milk out of your breast. It should not be painful either before, during or after expressing, and the following tips may help:

- Start by getting as comfortable and relaxed as possible
- It can help to have a bath or shower before expressing to warm your breast tissue. You can use warm flannels applied to your breasts and gently massage your breasts before expressing as a way to stimulate the flow of colostrum
- Cup your breast with your hand in a 'C' shape, with 4 fingers under the breast 1-2 cm away from the nipple and the thumb 1-2cm above the nipple
- Using your thumb and index finger, gently compress and release – this should not hurt
- After releasing the pressure, repeat again and again building up a rhythm. Avoid sliding fingers over the skin. Milk should begin to flow
- If the milk doesn't flow drop by drop, try moving your fingers slightly towards the nipple or further away, finding a spot that works best for you
- When the flow slows, move your fingers around the breast (like moving around the numbers on a clock face), so you have expressed the milk from all the way around your breast
- Repeat the procedure and express from the other breast

### **Note**

You may find that when you express you feel your tummy going hard and relaxing. This is called "Braxton Hicks' contractions.

Do not worry about these unless they begin to feel like regular, period type cramps or milk labour contractions. This is rare but if this happens you should stop expressing and rest.

If they continue and you are concerned, please phone our labour ward triage on 024 7696 7333.

## Patient Information

You may find it useful to visit the [UHCW Infant Feeding Linktree](#) for more information about antenatal expression of colostrum, and for a video showing how to hand express.



## How to store expressed colostrum

- Amounts expressed will be small at first and will gradually increase - every drop is valuable
- If you are expressing again the same day, place the sterile syringe in a clean, sealed zip-lock bag at the back of the fridge
- When you have finished expressing for the day, label the syringe with your name, date of birth and the date expressed before placing in the freezer
- You can store several syringes or containers together in a sealed zip-lock bag
- You can express 2-3 times in the same day
- With a freezer at  $-18^{\circ}\text{C}$  or lower, colostrum is safe for 6 months

## Taking colostrum to the hospital

When you got to the hospital for the birth, take the stored colostrum with you in a cool bag with icepacks. Once the colostrum has been thawed, it must be used within 24 hours, but should remain chilled at all times. There is no freezer storage in the hospital but there is a fridge where we can keep your colostrum.

If you are attending hospital for an induction, this can be a lengthy process, so it is best to bring in the colostrum from home once in established labour.

Please let the midwife caring for you know that you have colostrum as soon as you arrive who can arrange for it to be stored in the designated fridge. Make sure each syringe is marked clearly with your name and date of birth.

## Patient Information

### **After you go home**

Make sure your baby feeds often – diabetes can make it take a little longer for your ‘milk to come in’

- Breastfeeding every 2-3 hours as a minimum each day will help to build your milk supply.
- Check for a least 6 wet nappies and 3 bowel movements every 24 hours after the first 3 days.

### **Taking care of yourself**

Your blood sugar may fluctuate while you breastfeed.

- Eat a snack with carbohydrate and protein before or while breastfeeding
- Keep snacks close by in the places where you breastfeed
- Talk to the diabetic team or your midwife about how much extra you should eat whilst you are breastfeeding
- Feeling thirsty at the start of a breastfeed is normal, keep a bottle or glass of water near where you breastfeed your baby
- You can now eat foods which you avoided in pregnancy

### **Get help if your nipples feel sore**

Breastfeeding should be pleasant and comfortable. Being diabetic increases your risk of developing a yeast infection (thrush) (a yeast infection) or sore breast (mastitis). Contact your community midwife straight away if you have any concerns.

### **Where to get support for breastfeeding**

#### **Community midwives and maternity care assistants**

When you are discharged from hospital, your community midwife and the maternity care assistants will be able to help and support you with breastfeeding. They will give you details of local breastfeeding support groups in your area.

## Patient Information

### Health visitors

Your health visitor will make contact with you about 10 days after your baby is born and can also help you with breastfeeding.

### Breastfeeding support helplines

Help is usually provided by phone and support is from another breastfeeding mother who has been trained to be able help.

**National Breastfeeding Helpline**, operated by the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers **0300 100 0212**  
**Press option 2 for Polish**

**Bengali and Sylhetti Infant Feeding Advisors 0300 456 2421**

**Coventry Infant Feeding Support Team: 079 0498 4620**  
[breastfeedingsupport@coventry.gov.uk](mailto:breastfeedingsupport@coventry.gov.uk)

**La Leche League: 0845 120 2918**

**National Childbirth Trust: 0300 330 0771**

**UHCW Infant Feeding Linktree: Scan the QR Code below.**



Alternatively, visit [linktr.ee/uhcwinfantfeeding](https://linktr.ee/uhcwinfantfeeding)

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 6580 and we will do our best to meet your needs.



## Patient Information

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

### Did we get it right?

We would like you to tell us what you think about our services. This helps us make further improvements and recognise members of staff who provide a good service.



Have your say. Scan the QR code or visit:

[www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback](http://www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback)

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