

Maternity

Expressing breastmilk before your baby is born

Did you know you can hand express and collect first breast milk called colostrum before your baby is born? This is called antenatal expression.

You can start expressing from 36 weeks of pregnancy, unless you have risk factors. You can talk to your community midwife or the infant feeding team, they can help and give advice.

Colostrum is the first milk your body makes, starting around 16 weeks of pregnancy. Colostrum has everything your baby needs to stay healthy in their first few days. It helps protect the baby from getting sick, and helps their brain, eyes, and nerves grow strong. It has the perfect mix of fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals, and live cells to fight infections. It helps keep your baby's blood sugar exactly right.

Collecting colostrum is especially useful if you:

- Are diabetic,
- Have a planned caesarean
- Are having twins or triplets
- Know your baby is going to be born early
- Have a medical condition like high blood pressure

You can hand express 2 to 3 times a day, for about 5 to 10 minutes each time. Do not worry if you don't get much, this helps your body get ready to make more milk when the baby is born. It will be useful to learn how to hand express, so there is one less thing to learn once your baby arrives.

If your pregnancy is consultant led, giving this extra milk will reduce the risk of baby being in the neonatal unit. We can give you colostrum packs which have information, and 1ml syringes and caps to collect milk in. You can add milk to the same syringe for up to 24 hours in the fridge before storing in the freezer.



Patient Information

When you come to hospital to have your baby, bring your colostrum in a cool bag with an ice pack and give it to your midwife. They will keep it in a fridge until baby needs it. If you are having a planned induction of labour, ask your birth partner to bring the colostrum when baby is born. We do not have freezers for this milk, and we do not want it to defrost too quickly. We only keep expressed breastmilk in our designated EBM fridge for 48 hours.

Sometimes, expressing can cause mild contractions. If this happens every time you express, stop and tell your midwife.

How to hand express

Before you start:

- Wash your hands well.
- Use a clean container like a 1ml sterile syringe to collect colostrum. Some syringes have a free-fastening lid that needs to be taken off before you give the milk to your baby. Take off the lid right after you take the syringe out of the fridge.
- Always keep syringes and lids away from babies and children.

Steps to hand express:

1. It helps to be in a warm, private, relaxing environment. This helps oxytocin, the hormone needed to help release colostrum. Gently massage all around your breasts for a few minutes before expressing. Warm flannels or the warm water from a shower or bath can also help.
2. Put your thumb and fingers in a 'C' shape about 2 to 3cm from the base of the nipple, where the skin feels different. To find this, gently move your fingers around the breast until the skin feels different.
3. Gently press and release in the same place, until you see colostrum coming out.
4. Do not slide your fingers over the skin.
5. Collect the colostrum with a sterile syringe. Your partner can also help.
6. When the milk flow slows down or stops, move your fingers to a different part of your breast and repeat. Then move to the next breast and do the same.
7. You might only get 1 or 2 drops at a time, which is very normal. Each drop of colostrum contains around 3 million antibodies.
8. Label your milk with your name, date of birth, and date and time you expressed. Put milk in the freezer until you need it. Use within 24 hours of taking out the freezer and keep in the fridge.

Patient Information

Don't worry:

- Colostrum does not 'run out.' Your body will keep making colostrum until your milk 'comes in' (which is around day 3 after birth but can be different for each person).
- If you do not get any colostrum during pregnancy, it does not mean you won't have milk after the birth.
- The hormonal changes at and after birth, mean your body will start making the right amount of milk for your baby.
- You do not have to express during pregnancy, and your midwife will help teach you to hand express before you go home with your baby.

To learn more about hand expressing, there is a picture guide in the "Mothers and Others Guide" on page 19, which will have been given to you by your community midwife. If you do not have a copy of this guide, please speak to your midwife.

Hand expressing is a useful skill. You can keep doing it after your baby is born, when you need to.

Before your baby is born, it is important to only hand express, do not use a breast pump yet. If you need to use a breast pump after your baby is born, your midwife will help you with that.

You can search online "UNICEF antenatal hand expression" to find helpful videos and more information.



Mothers and Others Guide

Storage of antenatal colostrum

If you choose to store the colostrum you have expressed antenatally, this needs to be labelled with your name, date of birth, and the date and time that the colostrum was expressed. It should be stored in the freezer until you need it. Frozen colostrum needs to be used within 12 hours of complete thawing (and within 24 hours of taking out of the freezer) and should be stored in the fridge.

Expressed milk storage

The following table shows how long you can safely keep expressed milk (including colostrum). Please remember, the rules for storing milk in the hospital are different to storing at home.

Patient Information

Storing expressed milk

Place	At home	In hospital
Normal room temperature	4 to 6 hours	Up to 4 hours
Fridge: 5 - 10 degrees	3 days	Up to 2 days (48 hours)
Fridge: 4 degrees or lower	5 days*	Up to 2 days (48 hours)

* If temperature rises above 4 degrees after 3 days, use within 6 hours or throw away.

Frozen expressed milk

Place	At home	In hospital
Freezer: 18 degrees or lower	6 months	3 months

Defrosting expressed milk

Place	At home and hospital
When defrosting in the fridge	Takes 12 hours. Use as soon as fully defrosted and within 24 hours of removal from freezer

Important information

- Never freeze breastmilk again after it has already been frozen once.
- You can give your baby milk cold from the fridge, or warm it up by putting the container in warm water for a little while.
- Never use a microwave to warm breastmilk. It can make 'hot spots' and ruin the milk.

After your baby is born

When your baby is born, if it is safe, you and your baby will be offered skin-to-skin contact. This helps babies feel calm and helps you both bond.

We recommend you do skin-to-skin for:

- At least 1 hour,
- Until after your baby's first feed,
- Or as long as you want to.

If you can't do skin-to-skin right away, the nurses and doctors will help you do it as soon as it is okay.

Most babies will start breastfeeding/chestfeeding soon after birth, and you might not even need to use your expressed milk.

Some babies may need to be fed at certain times to keep their blood sugar safe, especially if the mum has diabetes. Your doctor and midwife will talk to you about this before your baby is born.

Some babies may be slow to feed or have trouble feeding in the first few days.

If this happens, you will get help from your midwife, and you might want to use some of your stored colostrum. Your midwife will show you how to feed this milk to your baby.

If your baby needs neonatal care and can't feed at the breast/chest, your expressed milk can be given in other ways, like through mouth care or a tiny feeding tube (nasogastric tube).

Useful contacts

Coventry Infant Feeding Support Team:

0790 4984 620 (Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm)

<https://linktr.ee/coventryift>

Warwickshire SWFT Infant Feeding Support Team:

swg-tr.breastfeedingnorth@nhs.net

<https://linktr.ee/nhswarwickshirebreastfeeding>

National Breastfeeding Helpline: 0300 100 0212 (09:00am to 09:00pm)

Patient Information

NCT Breastfeeding Helpline: 0300 330 0700 (08:00am to 10:00pm)

The Breastfeeding Network Support line: 0300 100 0210

La Leche League Helpline: 0845 120 2918

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers: 08444 122 949

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.



The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or formats, please contact 024 7696 4000 ext. 26580 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

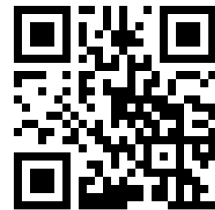
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