

Maternity

Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting

Information for patients about how to
hand express colostrum while pregnant
and the benefits for your baby.

What is colostrum?

It is the first breastmilk you produce, usually from about 16 weeks of pregnancy. Sometimes during pregnancy colostrum may leak from your breasts.

Colostrum is perfectly balanced for all your baby's needs. It contains antibodies to protect your baby from infections, it lines the baby's gut to help kick start their immune system. It also helps stabilise baby's blood sugars and helps them pass their first dark poo (meconium) which can reduce the risk of jaundice.

What is antenatal colostrum harvesting?

It is the expressing and collecting of your first breastmilk (colostrum) during pregnancy and helps get breastfeeding off to a good start. If your baby requires extra milk, you can use your harvested colostrum instead of artificial milk.

When should I start colostrum harvesting?

We recommend you start colostrum harvesting from 36-37 weeks of pregnancy. It is unlikely to trigger labour but if while expressing you have painful contractions, you should stop expressing and call your midwife or the maternity helpline for advice.

Maternity Helpline: 020 3312 6135.

Why should I express colostrum before I have had my baby?

Learning how to express colostrum while you are pregnant helps you to get to know your breasts and how they work, giving you extra confidence to start breastfeeding. It is useful if you are unable to feed your baby straight after birth for whatever reason, ensuring they get the protection needed for life outside the womb.

Expressing colostrum can help if you:

- have pre-existing diabetes or develop diabetes while you are pregnant (gestational diabetes)
- have taken certain medications during pregnancy for high blood pressure. Your doctor or midwife will advise if this applies to you.
- Are having more than one baby
- Are having a planned (elective) caesarean section
- Have a history of breast surgery
- Have had problems with breastfeeding after previous births

In addition, it can be of benefit to your baby to collect and feed them your colostrum if:

- Scans show they are small for their gestational age
- They have been diagnosed with fetal cleft palate/lip

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- They are going to have a planned admission to the neonatal ward after birth
 - They have any congenital conditions

Are there any reasons why I should not express colostrum before birth?

Do not express colostrum while pregnant if you:

- Have a history of threatened and/or actual premature labour
- Have a cervical suture (stitch) in place
- Are taking a drug that may be harmful for your baby to have through your breastmilk
- Have placenta praevia, accreta, percreta, placental site unknown in absence of USS or a low-lying placenta
- Have untreated HIV or a high viral load (please discuss this with your obstetrician)

There may be other reasons why you should not express colostrum before you have had your baby, so please discuss this with your midwife or obstetrician.

How do I hand express colostrum?

Wash your hands with soap and water, then dry them with a clean towel. Next, make sure you have a sterile container, such as a syringe, to collect the colostrum (a pack will be provided by your midwife).

Make sure you are relaxed and comfortable. It might take a while for the colostrum to appear when you start. Be patient and relax – it can take several goes and it's normal to see a small amount.



1. Gently massage your breast from the outer parts towards the nipple in all directions then roll or tweak your nipple. Do this for about 2-3 minutes. This stimulates oxytocin, which is your milk release hormone.



2. Start at the end of your nipple and feel back about 2-3 finger breadths, this is roughly where your milk ducts are. Position your thumb and your forefinger in a 'C' shape.



3. Gently but firmly compress and release your finger and thumb in a rhythmic motion. Do not slide your fingers over your skin or nipple. Expressing should not hurt. It may take a few minutes before you see any colostrum, it will be small drops and sticky in texture. Collect your colostrum in a sterile syringe.



4. When the flow slows down or stops, change the 'C' shape so that you move around the breast. You can move to your other breast and repeat.

5. When you have finished, label your colostrum with your name, date of birth and the date and time you expressed it.

Scan this QR code to watch the UNICEF video on hand expressing. This video is a demonstration of the technique, the amount of colostrum is not reflective of what you may find during pregnancy. It is normal to see small amounts or none at all.



How often should I hand express?

It is up to you. Start expressing once a day for 15 minutes and you can increase to 2-3 times a day if you would like. Just remember to do what feels comfortable for you.

How do I store colostrum?

The below table shows the recommended maximum safe storage times for your colostrum whilst you are at home. In hospital these times will change so please speak to your midwife. Do not forget to note on the container the date and time you express the colostrum.

Room temperature	6 hours
Fridge 5-10 degrees	3 days
Fridge 4 degrees and lower	5 days
Freezer -18 degrees and lower	6 months
Defrosted	Use straight away

The Breastfeeding Network, 2019.

What is the best way to bring my colostrum into hospital with me?

When you transport your colostrum into hospital, put your colostrum into an insulated cool bag with ice packs in the spaces as this will help maintain the temperature of the colostrum. Defrosted milk cannot be refrozen and would need to be used straight away. When you get into hospital, let your midwife know you have brought your colostrum with you, and they will put it in the freezer or fridge. You

need to make sure it is labelled with your name, date of birth and the time and date expressed.

Using your colostrum

When you are ready to use your colostrum the midwife or support worker will show you how to defrost it and how to safely give it your baby via finger feeding. Please check the label for your name and date of birth to ensure it is your milk.

Please ensure you remove the enteral cap from the syringe before giving your colostrum to your baby.

More information

If you would like more information on feeding and caring for your baby scan the QR code for a website with resources from the infant feeding team.



Sign up to Infant Feeding workshop on Eventbrite from 28 weeks:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/feeding-your-baby-antenatal-prism-course-tickets-450486305667?aff=ebsoporgprofile>

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

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