

# Antenatal colostrum harvesting

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This information leaflet explains how to hand express colostrum while you are pregnant and the benefits for your baby. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to your midwife or infant feeding team.

## Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your **name** and **date of birth** and check your **ID band**. If you don't have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address.

**If we don't ask these questions, then please ask us to check.**

## What is colostrum?

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

Colostrum is perfectly balanced for all your baby's needs. It contains antibodies to protect your baby from infections and hormones to help gut growth and kick start their immune system. It also 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 collection of your first milk – 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 weeks of pregnancy** (32 weeks in twin pregnancies if planned early delivery and from 34 weeks for type 1 diabetics, please discuss further with your consultant).

It is unlikely to trigger labour but please check the 'Are there any reasons why I should not hand express colostrum before birth?' information in this leaflet before starting. If while expressing you have any painful contractions, you should stop expressing and call your midwife or the Maternity Telephone Assessment Line for advice.

King's College Hospital Telephone Assessment Line: **020 3299 8389**  
Princess Royal University Hospital Assessment Line: **01689 863572**



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

Learning how to express milk 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 also help if you:

- have pre-existing diabetes or develop diabetes while you are pregnant (gestational diabetes)
- have breast hypoplasia (underdeveloped milk-producing breast tissue)
- have multiple sclerosis
- are having a planned (elective) caesarean section
- have a history of breast surgery
- have taken certain medications during pregnancy for high blood pressure. Your doctor or midwife will advise if this applies to you.
- have had problems with breastfeeding after previous births
- have a strong family history of dairy intolerance
- have a strong family history of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)
- are having more than one baby
- have a body mass index (BMI) score of 30 or above
- have a hormonal disorder such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

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 or lip
- they are going to have a planned admission to the neonatal ward after birth
- they have any genetic conditions.

## Are there any reasons why I should not hand 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 breast milk. For more information you can contact the Drugs in Breastmilk information service through its Facebook page – BreastfeedingNetworkDrugsInBreastmilk – or email [druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](mailto:druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk)
- have placenta praevia, accreta, percreta, placental site unknown in absence of USS, vasa praevia and/or low-lying placenta.

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

Make sure you are relaxed and comfortable. Try looking at a picture of your scan, talk to your baby or touch your bump to feel connected to your baby. 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 your nipple in all directions (for about two minutes). Then roll or tweak your nipple (for about one minute). This stimulates oxytocin which is your milk release hormone.





**2.** Position your thumb and your fingers in a 'C' shape. Start at the end of your nipple and feel back to where there is a texture change, usually about 2 to 3cm from your nipple.



**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. Collect your colostrum in a sterile syringe.



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

**5.** When you have finished, label your colostrum with your full name, hospital number, date of birth and the date and time you expressed it. Then store it following the guidelines in the 'Storing your milk at home' on page 6.

## How often should I hand express?

It is up to you. You can express as little as twice a day or as much as 8 times a day. For example, you could start hand expressing twice a day, for 10 minutes, from 36 weeks increasing the frequency gradually to a maximum of 8 times a day if you choose. Just remember to do what feels comfortable for you.

## Safe storage of milk at home

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

## Storing your milk at home

Room temperature	6 hours
Fridge 5-10 degrees	3 days
Fridge 4 degrees and lower	5 days (if temperature rises above 4 degrees after 3 days, use within 6 hours)
Freezer minus 18 degrees and lower	6 months
Defrosted	Use straight away.

*The Breastfeeding Network, 2019*

Milk stored at home should be kept away from meat products, eggs or any uncooked food. It should be kept in the back of the fridge and not in the door.

## What is the best way of bringing my colostrum into hospital with me?

When you transport your colostrum into hospital put it into an insulated cool bag and fill the space with ice packs. This will maintain the temperature. Defrosted milk cannot be refrozen.

You can also leave your colostrum at home and bring it into hospital when needed so it does not exceed the recommended storage times.

When you get to hospital, let your midwife know you have brought your first milk with you. They will put it in the fridge or freezer. Make sure it is labelled with your name, hospital number, date of birth and time and date expressed.



After your baby is born, the midwife will show you how to safely give your first milk to your baby.

## **Storing your milk in hospital**

The storage times are different in hospital from at home so please speak to your midwife.

## **Using your colostrum**

When you are ready to use your colostrum the midwife will show you where it is, how to defrost and how to safely give it to your baby. Please check the label for your name, hospital number and date of birth to ensure it is your milk.

## **How do I hand express?**



Scan this QR code to watch the RCM award winning video on colostrum collection by Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust or visit <https://tinyurl.com/4frmjary> Please note, our safe storage temperatures differ, please refer to page 6.



Scan this QR code to watch the UNICEF video on hand expressing or visit <https://tinyurl.com/5b74vxpu>

Please note, this video is a demonstration of technique. The amount of colostrum is not reflective of what you may find in the antenatal period. It is normal to see small amounts or there can be none at all.

## **More information**

If you would like any more information on feeding and caring for your baby visit:

- [www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly](http://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly)
- [www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk)
- [www.laleche.org.uk](http://www.laleche.org.uk)

## **Infant feeding sessions – available from 34 weeks**

**King's College Hospital:** Sign up to Infant Feeding on Eventbrite:  
<https://tinyurl.com/4ea2d5n9>

**Princess Royal University Hospital:** Sign up to Infant Feeding on Eventbrite: <https://tinyurl.com/49u595sx>

Princess Royal University Hospital Infant Feeding Team helpline:  
07866 927594, 7am to 7pm everyday, including bank holidays.

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

Tel: **020 3299 4618**

Email: **kings.pals@nhs.net**

**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Interpreting and Accessible Communication Support on 020 3299 4618 or email [kings.access@nhs.net](mailto:kings.access@nhs.net)**