

Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting

Why should I express my milk antenatally?

Colostrum harvesting is collecting colostrum from the breast. Colostrum is a sticky liquid which is made before breast milk is produced.

It is produced from approximately the 16th week in pregnancy up until the first few days after the baby has been born, and is called the baby's 'first vaccine' as it is extremely rich in antibodies, which helps boost the baby's immune system.

Colostrum is also packed with proteins, vitamins, minerals and salt which help prevent dehydration.

Colostrum also has a 'laxative' effect and helps the baby to pass meconium which assists in preventing jaundice and helps to regulate your baby's blood sugars.

Who can harvest colostrum?

The majority of expectant mother can express her colostrum from 36-37 weeks (please see below for when colostrum harvesting is not recommended).

However, we would strongly recommend harvesting colostrum if you have any of the following risk factors:

- Women with diabetes in pregnancy (pre-existing or gestational)
- Infants diagnosed during the antenatal period with cleft lip/palate or congenital conditions
- A strong family history of dairy intolerance or inflammatory bowel disease
- A baby who is not growing well
- Women with breast hypoplasia or had breast surgery
- Women with polycystic ovarian disease
- Women with multiple sclerosis



- Mothers who are having an elective Lower Segment Caesarean Section
- Mothers who have high blood pressure or are taking beta blockers (ie: Labetalol).

Who cannot express colostrum antenatally?

Those who have:

- History of threatened/actual premature labour
- History of Antepartum haemorrhage
- More than one previous Lower Segment Caesarean Section
- Cervical incompetence or Cervical suture in situ
- Multiple Pregnancy (twins, triplets etc).

You may feel your womb going hard and then relaxing without pain, these are called Braxton-hicks contractions. Do not worry about these, unless they begin to feel like period type cramps or mild labour contractions.

This is rare, but if it does happen, you should stop expressing immediately and rest. If they do not stop and you think you are in early labour, you should telephone Triage on 01302 642711 / 642712.

When can I start?

You can start from 36-37 weeks of pregnancy.

How often can I express?

We recommend you express up to 2 to 3 times a day, for approximately 5-10 minutes each session.

How much colostrum will I produce?

This will vary from mother to mother, from a few drops to a teaspoonful. Colostrum may be yellow/orange or clear in colour, and is thick and sticky.

It is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby to fight infections. This small amount is perfect for your new baby.

Do not expect to get great amounts of colostrum, unless you're really lucky! You may only get a bead or two but don't give in. Please do not worry that your supply will run out, you will continue to produce colostrum, the more you express, the more you will collect and every drop of liquid gold counts.

How should I collect my Colostrum?

Please ask your community midwife or midwife in Antenatal Clinic for a pack containing small syringes, caps, and labels, which you can use to collect your colostrum.

You can express your colostrum 2 or 3 times each day into the same syringe, keeping the syringe in the fridge between collections and using a new syringe every day. The syringes can then be capped, labelled with your name, the date and time you expressed, and put into a freezer bag.

How do I store my Colostrum?

You can store your colostrum in the freezer, and then when you come into hospital in labour or for your Induction of labour, bring some of your frozen syringes into Hospital in a cool bag with an ice pack. Give these immediately to the Midwife on admission so that they can be stored correctly in our ward freezer.

How to give the Colostrum

Your midwife will discuss with you how to safely feed your expressed colostrum to your baby, alongside breastfeeding and expressing to stimulate milk production.

Any questions please contact your community midwife or email the Infant Feeding Team;

dbth.infantfeedingteam@nhs.net.

How do I express my Colostrum?

Please hold your phone camera over the QR code to access the hand expression video or copy and paste this video link:

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



The best way to do this is by hand:

1. Make sure you are relaxed and comfortable, a warm bath/shower can be useful when first trying
2. Have your syringe ready before you start
3. Get comfortable and start with a gentle breast massage to stimulate the hormonal reflexes for prolactin and oxytocin release
4. Stroke from the back of your breast towards your nipple for one or two minutes
5. Cup your breast with your thumb and fingers in a 'C' shape about 2-3 cm back from the base of your nipple
6. Gently squeeze your fingers and thumb together in a rhythmic action; it may take a while before you see any colostrum appear
7. If no colostrum appears after a few minutes simply move your fingers a fraction forward or back and try again to find the right spot
8. Only expect a few drops at a time
9. When the drops stop, move your fingers around to try a different section of your breast and then swap to the other breast.

If you find this is not working for you, speak to your midwife and they will give you some tips.

Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)

The team are available to help with any concerns, complaints or questions you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

The contact details are:

Telephone: 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059.

Email: dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net