

## Patient information

# Antenatal hand expression

## Why is hand expressing breast milk in pregnancy helpful?

Importantly, it may help you to understand how your breasts work to make milk.

- Expressing milk antenatally will increase your confidence in you and your body's ability to produce milk and breastfeed.
- If there are early challenges with feeding, having colostrum ready enables you to give your own milk to your baby instead of formula in those first hours.
- It supports exclusive breastfeeding.
- Practising expressing means you start your feeding journey with a skill that you may need to use in the postnatal (after birth) period. Hand expression is often used to tempt a sleepy baby, it can also encourage your baby to latch to the breast, stimulate milk flow and can be used if you have a blocked duct.
- Some babies may experience difficulties with feeding or maintaining their blood sugar levels during the first few days after birth and therefore may require extra feeds. Colostrum is the best milk to give your baby and therefore expressing antenatally is really useful.
- Engorgement (when breasts become overly full) is also common in the postnatal period and hand expressing a small amount of milk prior to a feed can help your baby to latch to the breast.

## What is colostrum?

Colostrum is the thick and sticky early breastmilk that you begin to produce during pregnancy and for the first few days after birth. You will make small amounts at first, often less than a millilitre at each feed or expression, and this amount of colostrum is usually enough for the needs of a healthy baby born at term. It can be almost transparent, or within the range of light to a deep yellow colour.

Colostrum has the perfect balance of proteins, fats, and micronutrients that your baby needs. It also contains vital immunological properties and helps to coat your baby's gut with healthy bacteria, which helps to protect against allergy and disease.

## How to hand express whilst pregnant?

Use your phone camera to scan this QR code, this will take you to a useful video on how to hand express.



Alternatively, here is the web link:

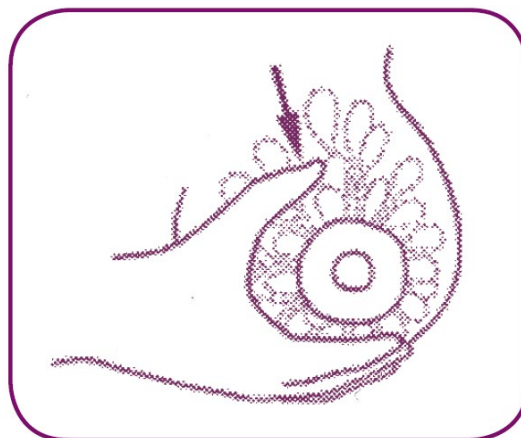
<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/>

The mothers and others guide provided by your community midwife contains detailed information and visual images to help you to hand express. Here are a few basic pointers.

- It is best to be relaxed before attempting to hand express. Taking a bath or shower, using relaxation or massage technique may help.
- Ensure your hands have been thoroughly washed and dried.
- Collect the colostrum in a sterile container. The syringes or colostrum harvesting pots provided by antenatal clinic or your community midwife are ideal.

### How to:

- It is important to stimulate your breasts with massage prior to expressing.
- Next, placing your finger and thumb about 2.5cm from the nipple in a 'C' shape compress your breast in a steady rhythm without sliding your fingers along the skin.
- Reposition your fingers around the breast until the colostrum starts to flow.
- When the flow of colostrum stops repeat on the second breast.



## **How much colostrum will I get and how often should I hand express?**

If you have an uncomplicated pregnancy, we recommend that you start hand expressing from 36 weeks. Your midwife may have already discussed with you hand expressing if you have been diagnosed with conditions such as diabetes in pregnancy.

The amount you get will range from an initial few drops to a teaspoon or more of often thick, sticky liquid with a clear or yellow colour. Express by hand as often as you feel comfortable, perhaps start with a few minutes once or twice a day and build up to more frequent expressions if you wish.

Do not worry if you do not manage to express any milk before your baby is born. The stimulation alone can help with the flow of colostrum once you have given birth.

If you experience any tightening associated with hand expressing, stop and seek advice from your midwife.

## **When is it not advisable to hand express?**

We do not recommend that you start antenatal hand expressing if you have experienced any of the following complications within your pregnancy:

- Previous premature labour (less than 37 weeks)
- Threatened premature labour in current pregnancy, which includes contractions
- Vaginal bleeding
- Premature rupture of membranes.

## **How do I store my expressed milk?**

Once you have collected your milk, your syringes should be labelled with your name, date of birth and date / time of collection. They can then be stored in the freezer and should be placed in the freezer as soon as possible. If you do not have a freezer, they can be stored in the fridge between 2-4 degrees C for up to 5 days.

Colostrum that has been expressed on the same day can be collected in the same syringe. It should be placed in the fridge between expressing sessions and then placed in the freezer once you have stopped expressing for that day.

<b>Milk</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Maximum time</b>
Fresh breastmilk including colostrum	Normal room temperature	6 hours
	Fridge: 5 to 10°C	3 days
	Fridge: 4°C or lower	5 days*
(*If temperature rises above 4°C after 3 days, use within 6 hours or throw away)		
Frozen breast milk	Freezer: -18°C or lower	6 months
Defrosting breast milk	When defrosting in fridge	Usually takes 12 hours to defrost, then use as soon as defrosted
	When defrosting milk outside fridge	Use as soon as fully defrosted

## Transporting your expressed colostrum into hospital

**Please bring your expressed colostrum into hospital.**

It is best to freeze your colostrum as you collect it at home and bring it into hospital. Please ensure it is labelled correctly with your name, D.O.B and time and date the milk was collected.

Please use a cool bag with an ice pack for transporting it into hospital and ask a midwife to put it in the designated freezer as soon as possible upon arrival.

**If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities, please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo)**  
<https://www.accessable.co.uk>

