



Information for  
patients and  
carers

**Expressing your milk antenatally**  
Information and advice for mothers-to-be

## Why express milk antenatally?

There are benefits of having colostrum ready at the point of birth. Colostrum is very protective, not only does it regulate blood sugars, but also protects babies from infection, optimises bowel movement, and is easy to digest.

## Breast feeding and diabetes

It is known that exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months provides many health benefits for babies and their mothers. If you have diabetes there are some additional benefits:

- Babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop childhood diabetes. It is thought that cow's milk (the main ingredient in formula milk) can trigger diabetes in some babies; this is probably more likely if you or your partner have diabetes
- If you have gestational diabetes, breastfeeding reduces your risk of developing diabetes in later life

During your pregnancy your diabetes will have been monitored very carefully to ensure that you and your baby remain well. Despite this, babies of mothers with diabetes are at risk of experiencing low blood sugar levels (hypoglycemia) in the first 24 hours after birth. Early and frequent breastfeeding is encouraged to avoid this but if this is not effective your baby might require additional feeds. Any colostrum collected antenatally can be brought into the unit at the time of birth and be used to assist in keeping blood sugar levels normal. For mothers-to-be who are diabetic, this can be commenced from 36 weeks.

## Can women who are not diabetic express antenatally too?

Any mother can express her breast milk from 37 weeks of pregnancy onwards. Other women who might find antenatal expressing helpful because their babies will be at increased risk of low blood glucose levels after birth, include:

- Women taking beta blockers to control their blood pressure (e.g. labetalol /methyldopa)
- Women whose babies are expected to be small at birth (less than 2.5 kg)

You can also start expressing colostrum during labour or if you are admitted for an induction of labour.

There are certain circumstances where antenatal expressing is not recommended, for example:

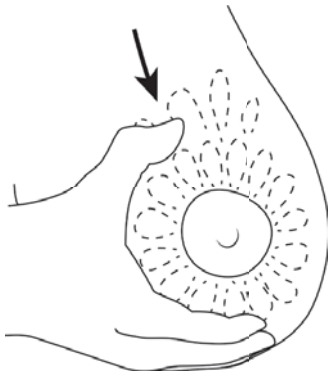
- Threatened/actual premature labour
- Having a cervical suture in place

Please discuss this with your midwife or obstetrician further if you are thinking of commencing expressing your colostrum in the antenatal period.

## How do I express my breast milk?

Hand expression is the most effective way of expressing your breasts during pregnancy and involves gently squeezing milk (at this stage called colostrum) out of your breast:

- Wash your hands
- Prepare and stimulate your breasts by gently stroking, massaging them including the nipple
- Cup your breast with your hand and position your fingers and thumb about 1-2 cm from the base of the nipple as shown in the diagram



- Without sliding your thumb and finger over your skin, gently push your breast back towards the chest wall.
- Bring your thumb and finger together in a press-release movement. Repeat this process again and again, building up into a rhythm. This should not hurt.

- The colostrum appears in drops and you can collect these drops in a sterile syringe. If you get more than a few drops it may be best to use a small sterile pot. We will provide you with syringes and/or pots
- If the milk doesn't flow, try moving your fingers slightly towards your nipple, or further away, find the spot that works for you. (If there is no flow or drops, continue with the following steps to stimulate the breasts and try again later in the day)
- When the flow stops move your fingers around the breast (as if you were moving round a clock face) and repeat the press-release until you have expressed colostrum from all round the breast
- Express from the other breast
- When you have finished fit the syringe cap or lid of your container. Label with your name and the date and time of collection. Place in the plastic bag provided and store in your freezer

## Note

Whilst expressing your breast milk you may feel your womb going hard then relaxing. These tightenings are called 'Braxton Hicks' contractions and are quite normal. However if the tightenings become stronger and feel like period pains or mild contractions, you should stop expressing and rest. If they continue you should contact:

Triage on **01772 524495** or  
Preston Birth Centre on **01772 524496**.

## Frequency of expressing

You can express your milk as often as you wish. We recommend doing it for short periods of times and only a couple of times a day.

It is important to be gentle and avoid any breast / nipple trauma or soreness.

## How much milk will I get?

This can vary from nothing, to a few drops to about a teaspoonful at each expressing. Colostrum is very concentrated in nutrients and its small volume is ideal for your baby's first feeds.

## Using your milk

When you are admitted to hospital to have your baby you should bring your milk with you in a cool bag with an "ice" block. Defrosted breast milk must be used within 24 hours and so if your milk is still frozen when you arrive at the hospital it will be stored in a freezer until nearer the time of your baby's birth.

When your baby is born you will be encouraged to offer a breast feed within the first hour. Your expressed milk may be given after this feed or with subsequent feeds depending on your baby's condition and feeding needs.

## Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:  
Specialist infant feeding midwife on **01772 524512**.

## Sources of further information

[www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk)

[www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

[www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

[www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)

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Please ask if you would like help in understanding this information. This information can be made available in large print and in other languages.

**Cantonese:**

如果你希望以另外一種格式接收該資訊，請和我們聯絡，不必猶豫。

**Gujarati:**

જો તમને આ માહિતી બીજી રચના કે ફોર્મેટમાં મેળવવાની ઈચ્છા હોય, તો કૃપા કરી અમારો સંપર્ક કરતા અચકાશો નહિ.

**Hungarian:**

Kérjük, vegye fel velünk a kapcsolatot, ha más formában kéri ezt az információt.

**Polish:**

Jeżeli chciał(a)by Pan/Pani otrzymać niniejsze informacje w innym formacie, prosimy o kontakt.

**Punjabi:**

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਫਾਰਮੈਟ ਵਿਚ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰਨ ਤੋਂ ਨਾ ਝਿਜਕੋ।

**Urdu:**

اگر آپ اس معلومات کو کسی اور صورت میں حاصل کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کرنے میں ہچکچاہٹ محسوس نہ کریں۔

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