

# Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting



Information for patients,  
relatives and carers

**This leaflet tells you how to hand express colostrum while you are pregnant and why it is good for your baby. If you have any questions, ask your midwife or the feeding team.**

## **What is colostrum?**

Colostrum is the first milk your body makes. It usually starts around 16 weeks of pregnancy. Sometimes, it might leak from your breasts while you are pregnant. Colostrum is perfect for your baby. It has special things that help protect your baby from sickness and help their tummy grow. It also helps your baby pass their first poo, which can stop them from getting jaundice (a yellow skin condition)..

## **What is antenatal colostrum harvesting?**

This means collecting colostrum from your breasts before your baby is born. It helps you start breastfeeding well. If your baby needs extra milk after birth, you can use the colostrum you saved instead of formula milk.

## **When should I start collecting colostrum?**

It's best to start from 36 weeks of pregnancy. Collecting colostrum usually doesn't cause labour. You might feel your tummy tighten and relax - this is normal and called Braxton Hicks contractions. If you feel cramps like period pains or real labour starts, stop collecting, rest, and try again later. If the cramps don't stop, call the MAMAS line at 0300 013 2004.

## **Why should I express colostrum before birth?**

Learning how to express milk before your baby is born helps you get to know your breasts. This can make you feel more confident to feed your baby. It is helpful if your baby can't feed straight away, so they still get the important protection from colostrum.

## When should I NOT express colostrum?

Do not express if you:

- Have had early (premature) labour problems.
- Have a stitch in your cervix.
- Take medicine that might harm your baby through breastmilk (ask your midwife or check online at [druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk](mailto:druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk))
- Have certain placenta problems (ask your midwife or doctor).

Talk to your midwife if you are unsure

## How do I hand express colostrum?



1. Wash your hands with soap and dry them well.
2. Get a clean container like a syringe to catch the colostrum.
3. Find a comfortable and quiet place. Try looking at a picture of your baby or gently touching your tummy to feel connected.
4. Gently rub your breast in circles from the outside toward your nipple for about 2 minutes.
5. Roll or gently squeeze your nipple for about 1 minute to help your milk come out.
6. Place your thumb and finger in a "C" shape about 2-3 cm from the base of your nipple.
7. Gently press and release your breast with your fingers in a rhythm. Don't slide your fingers on your skin or nipple. It should not hurt.
8. Collect the colostrum in your container/syringe. It might take a few minutes.
9. When the milk flow slows, move your fingers to a different spot and repeat.
10. You can do the same on the other breast.
11. Label your container with your name, hospital number, date of birth, and the time and date you collected the milk.
12. Store your milk safely (see next section).

## How often should I express?

You can do it as little as twice a day or up to 8 times a day. Start with twice a day for 10 minutes and do more if you want. Do what feels comfortable

## How do I store my colostrum at home?

- Keep it in the back of your fridge, not the fridge door.
- Keep it away from raw meat or eggs.
- You can freeze it for up to 2 weeks in the freezer part.
- Follow the storage guide below

This table shows the recommended maximum safe storage times for your colostrum whilst you are at home.

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

*The Breastfeeding Network, 2019*

## Bringing colostrum to hospital

- Only bring up to 5 syringes at a time.
- Keep the milk cool in a cool bag with ice packs.
- Do not refreeze thawed milk.
- Tell your midwife when you arrive, and they will freeze it safely.
- Make sure your milk is labelled with your name, hospital number, date of birth, and the time and date you expressed it

## Using your colostrum in hospital

- Midwives will check your milk and help you feed it to your baby safely.
- Take any unused milk home after you leave the hospital because leftover milk will be thrown away after 48 hours.

## Want to learn how to hand express?

Scan the QR code or visit the UNICEF website for a video showing how to do it.

<https://youtu.be/K0zVCwdJZw0>



**Remember, it's normal if you only get a little milk or none at all at first.**

## More information

Infant feeding workshops are available from 32 weeks via Microsoft TEAMS

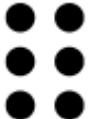
Please email the Infant feeding team to book.

For FPH [fhft.infantfeedingfph@nhs.net](mailto:fhft.infantfeedingfph@nhs.net)

For WPH [fhft.infantfeedingteam@nhs.net](mailto:fhft.infantfeedingteam@nhs.net)



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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on:

### **Frimley Park Hospital**

**Telephone:** 0300 613 6530

**Email:** [fhft.palsfrimleypark@nhs.net](mailto:fhft.palsfrimleypark@nhs.net)

### **Wexham Park and Heatherwood Hospitals**

**Telephone:** 0300 615 3365

**Email:** [fhft.palswexhampark@nhs.net](mailto:fhft.palswexhampark@nhs.net)

<b>Frimley Park Hospital</b> Portsmouth Road Frimley Surrey GU16 7UJ	<b>Heatherwood Hospital</b> Brook Avenue Ascot Berkshire SL5 7GB	<b>Wexham Park Hospital</b> Wexham Street Slough Berkshire SL2 4HL
<b>Switchboard:</b> 0300 614 5000		<b>Website:</b> <a href="http://www.fhft.nhs.uk">www.fhft.nhs.uk</a>

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### **Legal notice**

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible. Please therefore always check specific advice or any concerns you may have with your doctor.