

Expressing Colostrum During Pregnancy

A great way to get a head start!

What is colostrum?

Colostrum is the first breastmilk that you produce for your baby. Each drop is packed with valuable nutrition and germ fighting cells.

Even if you don't plan to breastfeed we can support you to collect colostrum before birth - all babies benefit from this first milk.

Why might I express colostrum in pregnancy?

Learning to hand express your colostrum in pregnancy is a great way to prepare for your breastfeeding journey. It can help you to feel more confident to get feeding off to a good start and to overcome any feeding challenges should they arise.

Expressing colostrum before your baby is born can be useful for everyone, but especially in the following situations:

- If you have diabetes (gestational or pre-existing)
- If your body mass index (BMI) is above 30
- If you have high blood pressure
- If you have any problems with your thyroid
- If you are having a planned caesarean birth
- If your labour is being induced

Scan the QR code to watch a video demonstrating hand expressing



Top Tips

- Massage first
- Low lights
- Calm environment
- Relaxation
- Warm bath

Don't worry if you still can't express anything - you can try again later.

Benefits of colostrum

- Helps to regulate your baby's blood sugar
- Protects against infection and some diseases
- Easy to digest
- It encourages early bowel movements
- It can reduce the effects of jaundice in your baby



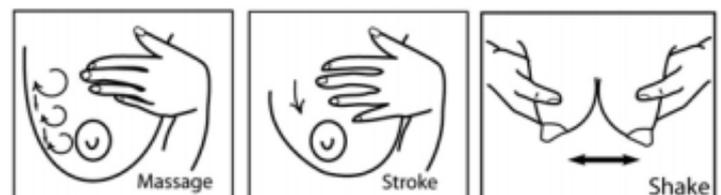
Image: A colostrum collector syringe

Getting Started

A member of the maternity team will provide you with colostrum collectors on/around 36 weeks of pregnancy. Colostrum collectors are a syringe with a blunt end (no needle) that you can use to collect your colostrum.

We recommend trying no sooner than 37 weeks of pregnancy as there is a small chance that trying before this time might stimulate pre-term labour which can be dangerous for your baby.

If your birth is planned or anticipated before 37 weeks, please ask to discuss this with midwife/obstetrician who will support you to decide the best time to begin expressing.



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Expressing colostrum

1. Ensure you have freshly washed hands and a sterile container/colostrum collector to hand.
2. It is important to feel that you are comfortable, calm and relaxed before you begin, as this will help you to express (remove) the colostrum from your breast more easily. Having the lights low lights or getting into a warm bath might help - see our top tips below.
3. We recommend a few minutes of gentle breast massage, stroking and shaking of your breasts before you begin. This helps to trigger the hormones needed for your milk to come out. Massage and stroke gently over both breasts, your nipples and under your arms - this should be gentle enough so that it is comfortable and does not mark your skin.
4. Making a 'C' shape with your hand as shown in the image, gently compress the breast tissue with your thumb and forefinger, then release. Repeat this action in a rhythmic motion. You may notice some small 'beads' of a clear/yellow/orange sticky substance starting to appear. It can often take a few minutes before you notice anything.
5. Continue until the flow stops. Then adjust/rotate your hand to a different position and start again, as this will drain another area of your breast. Repeat until the flow stops, then move to the next breast.



Trouble shooting

If you do not notice any colostrum appearing, try adjusting your hand position. Move your thumb and forefinger closer to the nipple or further back, until you find the right spot. Pushing back against the chest wall before you compress might also help. As you then compress, try rolling your thumb in a downwards motion as though you are making a thumb print - See image below. If you are still unable to express any colostrum, do not worry. You can try again later the same day or leave it until another day when you feel ready to try again.

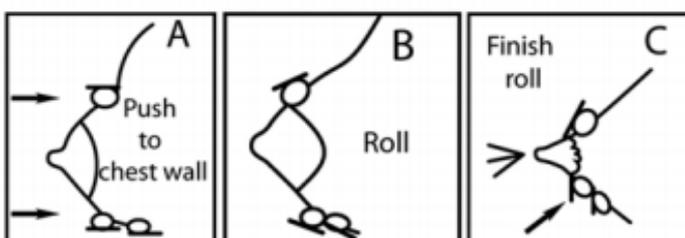


Image: La Leche League International - 2003

Remember - any amount of colostrum that you collect, however small, is extremely beneficial to your baby.

Storing and transporting colostrum

- You can use the colostrum collector multiple times in the same day
- At the end of each day (or if the syringe is full), label it with your name and the date and time it was collected
- Colostrum/breastmilk can be stored as follows:
 - In the back of a fridge for up to 5 days
 - In the ice compartment in a fridge for up to 2 weeks
 - In a deep freezer for up to 6 months
- Defrost in a fridge or hold in a warm hand
- Once defrosted, colostrum/breastmilk must be used immediately
- Before bringing into hospital, ensure your colostrum syringes/containers are together in one sealed, clear bag with your name, address and date of birth.
- Transport frozen colostrum in an insulated bag with an icepack.
- Inform the maternity team immediately on arrival so it can be put straight into the freezer

Support Contacts

You can access support face to face, online or over the phone 24/7:

South Tees Maternity Advice Line
01609 763093 - 24 hour/day

National Breastfeeding Helpline
0300 100 0212 - 9.30am-9:30pm 365 days/year

Start4Life

<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/>