

Antenatal Breast Expression

Before expressing colostrum antenatally it is important to discuss this with your Obstetrician and/or Midwife.

It is also important to note that antenatal expressing is usually started from 36 weeks of pregnancy. Please seek advice before expressing colostrum.

What is Colostrum?

Colostrum is a type of early breast milk, produced by the breasts from around 16 weeks of pregnancy until the first few days after birth. Colostrum is a thick, sticky, yellowish liquid.

Why express colostrum antenatally?

There are a variety of reasons why you can choose to express:

- To give baby extra fluid/nutrition in the first few days of life. This can be useful in case the baby needs extra feeds and avoids offering formula.
- To give extra calories to a premature or small baby or one who has low blood sugar levels (common with Diabetes and Gestational Diabetes). Receiving extra colostrum at this time can help a baby's blood sugar level to stabilise.
- If a woman knows she may have difficulty breastfeeding or latching the baby to the breast.
- Can be useful to having a store of colostrum if the baby is likely to need special care or is likely to be separated from their mother.
- Allows women to gain practice at expressing and become familiar with their breasts.

When is it not advisable to express colostrum?

Not all women wish to or are able to breastfeed. Some choose to express colostrum and offer this as well as formula after their baby is born. There are also times when it's not recommended.

Don't express your breasts if you:

- Are at risk of, or have had, threatened premature labour
- Have had a cervical suture inserted, or have been diagnosed with cervical incompetence
- Have experienced bleeding during your pregnancy
- Have been diagnosed with placenta praevia
- Have been advised by your maternity care provider not to

How to express colostrum

- Colostrum should start to arrive drop by drop. Initially it may just be a glisten on the end of your nipple, and it may take a few days of practice before drops appear. If nothing happens, adjust your finger position slightly to find the spot that works for you.
- You can use a syringe to suck up the drops as you go.
- Express each breast for up to 5 minutes. This can be done 1-3 times a day.
- Label the syringe with your name, the date and the time in a Ziplock bag or clean container into the freezer. It can be stored for 3 months in the freezer.
- Do not overfill the syringe as colostrum expands when it is frozen.
- Once it is thawed it should be used within 24 hours.
- It may be useful to have a look at online videos of hand expressing techniques

Top 5 tips for expressing colostrum

1. Start expressing at around 36 weeks into your pregnancy.
2. Stop if at any time you start to feel contractions.
3. Remember that any amount of colostrum will be beneficial to your baby.
4. Be patient as you learn how to express and store the colostrum safely.
5. Take the clearly labelled and frozen colostrum with you (in an esky or cooler bag with ice) when you have your baby.

DISCLAIMER This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your baby or your healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. Burnside Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you or your baby require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.

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