

San Maternity

Antenatal Expressing

Breastfeeding Information – Handout 17

Reviewed September 2023

What is Antenatal expressing?

Antenatal expressing refers to the practice of collecting colostrum before your baby is born.

Colostrum is the first milk available to your baby for the first few days after birth. Colostrum is made in small amounts but contains all the fluid and nutrients your baby needs as it is very concentrated. It is also easily digested by your baby and contains vital immune factors that help colonize your baby's gut with healthy bacteria. It may be yellow, white, rusty red or clear in colour.

Should you collect colostrum?

We do know that learning about breastfeeding before baby is born improves breastfeeding outcomes as it helps parents feel more confident about caring for their baby. Breastfeeding classes are held regularly at the San and information about breastfeeding can be found on the Australian Breastfeeding Association website. Contact information is below.

We know it is safe to collect colostrum from 36 weeks of pregnancy after consulting with your doctor, however it is the mothers' choice whether she collects colostrum.

Collecting colostrum may not be necessary for every woman but may be helpful if your baby needs extra fluid or nutrition after birth than they can get from breastfeeding alone. For example, if you have diabetes in your pregnancy, your baby may have low blood sugar. Even small amounts of breastmilk can support your babies sugar levels. It may also be beneficial if mothers have flat or inverted nipples, a history of low supply or expecting a baby with a cleft palate or cardiac condition.

How to start

You can start expressing colostrum from 36weeks after speaking with your doctor.

How much should I expect to collect?

On average, women collect a total volume of 5mls over the 4weeks they express.

Around 1 in 4 women are unable to collect any colostrum when the express antenatally. If this happens, please do not be concerned. The amount collected or not collected does not reflect future supply.

How do I collect and store my colostrum?

Expressing works best when you feel relaxed and warm. Some women find they are more successful if they express after a shower or use warm packs and gentle stroking of the breasts to prepare.

Equipment

You will need the following equipment:

1. Syringes and caps or a container to collect colostrum. 1ml and 3ml syringes work well.
2. Labels. You will need to label each syringe with your name, date of birth as well as the date and time the colostrum was collected.
3. A zip lock bag to store collected colostrum in the freezer.
4. A cold bag and freezer blocks. When you come to hospital you will need to transport the frozen colostrum in a freezer bag.

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Method for Antenatal Expressing

1. Thoroughly wash your hands prior to expressing.
2. Place the pads of your forefinger and thumb opposite each other on the outer edge of the areola. Gently press them back into the chest wall then squeeze the fingers together rhythmically. This should not hurt. Milk ducts are found all around the breast. Moving your fingers around the areola allows colostrum to be released from different areas.
3. Express both breasts for a few minutes each side, ideally twice a day.
4. If collecting directly into a syringe, use a new syringe each day.
5. If using a container, ensure that is cleaned with hot soapy water prior to collecting. Once collected draw up any colostrum in a syringe.
6. Label each syringe with your name, date of birth as well as the date and time collected.
7. Once you have collected and labelled your syringes you should store them in a zip lock bag in the back of the freezer until you come into hospital.



Remember: DO NOT worry if there is no colostrum or the amount collected seems small.

What to look out for:

Whilst it is common to experience brief, non-painful tightenings whilst hand expressing you should not express and contact labour ward if you are:

1. Experiencing abdominal pains or painful contractions.
2. Experiencing a prolonged tightening (lasting more than 1 minute)
3. Tightenings are frequent (more than 5 in 10 minutes)
4. Bleeding
5. Concerned about your baby's movements

How to bring colostrum to hospital:

When you come to hospital you will need to transport your zip lock bag of frozen colostrum in a freezer bag with ice bricks to keep it frozen. This should be given immediately to staff on arrival so that they can place it in a specialty freezer. Once defrosted, colostrum needs to be used in 24hrs so it will only be defrosted as required.

When to use colostrum

1. Colostrum can be defrosted by staff if it is needed by your baby.
2. Colostrum will only be given with your consent.
3. Staff will check Colostrum before it is given to baby.

For more information:

Australian Breastfeeding Association

p: 1800 686 268

w: www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Sydney Adventist Hospital Lactation Department

p: 02 9480 4071

w: www.sah.org.au/maternity

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