

Approvals:  
Maternity Guidelines Group: Aug 2016  
O&G SDU: Sep 2016 (Chair's action)  
MSLC: Sep 2016  
Equality Impact Assessment: Sep 2016  
Patient Experience Group: Nov 2016

## Women & Children's Division

### How can I help to reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming into and after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser. Staff will let you know if this is the case.

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Author: L Randall  
Issue date: December 2016  
Review date: December 2018

Leaflet code: n/a  
Version: 1

# Antenatal Hand Expression

## Patient information leaflet

If you require a translation or alternative format of this leaflet please contact your community midwife

Safe & compassionate care,

every time

## What is antenatal hand expression?

This means expressing your breast milk in the final few weeks of pregnancy before your baby arrives.

Colostrum is a thick, rich, breast milk substance which is perfectly designed to protect and nourish your baby in the first few days of their lives. It is particularly rich in immunological properties which helps to boost your baby's immune system and protect your baby against allergy and disease. Colostrum also helps your baby to pass meconium (the first bowel movement) which helps to prevent jaundice.

This first breast milk is produced from 16 to 20 weeks of pregnancy. Some women may find that they leak milk in pregnancy whereas other women do not. Both are normal and will not affect a woman's ability to successfully breastfeed.

The importance of exclusive breastfeeding for all babies is well established by research. Some newborn babies may experience difficulties with breast feeding, or maintaining their blood sugar levels, in the first few days after birth. By hand expressing and storing colostrum in pregnancy, if your baby has these difficulties, they can be supplemented with your own milk. Research shows that colostrum stabilises blood sugar levels in babies better than artificial milk.

You can express colostrum from 36 weeks pregnant, however if you are leaking before this time you can collect your colostrum in a sterile syringe. You may find it useful to talk to your Community Midwife; Diabetes Midwife or Infant Feeding Midwife. They can give you some equipment and guidance to get you started.

## Advantages to expressing colostrum in pregnancy

When women express colostrum in pregnancy, research has shown that they:

We continually strive to improve the quality of information given to patients. If you have any comments or suggestions regarding this information booklet, please contact:

Head of Midwifery  
Women & Children's Division  
Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust  
Stoke Mandeville Hospital  
Mandeville Road  
Aylesbury  
Buckinghamshire  
HP21 8AL

## When my baby is born

At birth, you and your baby should be given uninterrupted skin-to-skin contact to initiate breastfeeding as soon as possible (usually within the first 90 mins). Ideally your baby will breast feed well soon after birth and frequently at the breast so that your expressed colostrum remains unused!

However, some babies may need to be fed regularly (to maintain their blood sugars) or if baby has any difficulties with breastfeeding, you should be offered any on-going support to help solve these difficulties, and you may now want to use some of your stored colostrum. Ward staff will show you how to give your colostrum to your baby.

You will also be encouraged to continue to express your colostrum regularly, until baby is feeding effectively at the breast, to help establish your breast milk supply and provide the best milk for your baby.

We hope that you will find the process of expressing breast milk in pregnancy a positive one, providing you with reassurance and back-up if establishing breastfeeding is more challenging. We hope you will have learnt more about how your breasts work and that hand expressing in pregnancy will help you confidently breastfeed your baby!

## Useful Contact Numbers

|                                 |                     |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Breastfeeding Midwife           | <b>01296 315799</b> |
| Community Midwives Office (SMH) | <b>01296 316120</b> |
| Community Midwives Office (WH)  | <b>01494 425172</b> |

- Gain more confidence in how their breasts work prior to having a baby
- Establish a 'full supply' of breast milk more quickly
- Have increased confidence to breastfeed
- Have increased confidence in the skill of hand expressing breast milk.

Most women can hand express in pregnancy but there are certain groups of mothers and babies for whom antenatal expression of colostrum may be particularly beneficial:

- Babies at risk of hypoglycaemia or feeding difficulties
- Babies of mothers with diabetes
- Very small or growth restricted babies
- Babies of mothers taking beta blocker medication e.g. Labetalol
- Babies with a cleft lip/palate or other congenital abnormality, such as Down's Syndrome
- Babies who are known in pregnancy to need care in the Neonatal Unit
- Babies who are twins or triplets

There are certain women with medical or obstetric history that can make establishment of exclusive breastfeeding more challenging. Some other women have medical conditions, such as Multiple Sclerosis, which are actively improved by breastfeeding.

- Any form of Diabetes
- Polycystic ovary syndrome
- Breast hypoplasia
- Previous breast surgery
- Planned caesarean section

## Diabetes and allergic conditions

Mothers with a family history of dairy intolerance, inflammatory bowel disease or diabetes, are more likely to have babies who develop these conditions if they are exposed to the cows' milk protein in artificial milk early in infancy.

**It is particularly important for mothers with diabetes to avoid giving their baby formula milk if at all possible until the baby is at least 6 months old.**

Women with gestational diabetes are less likely to go on to develop diabetes in later life if they breastfeed their babies.

Women with diabetes should monitor their blood sugar levels carefully if they express colostrum antenatally. They may need to adjust their insulin and food intake accordingly.

### Are there women who shouldn't express colostrum in pregnancy?

There is no evidence that daily hand expression of colostrum can trigger labour for women who are not known to be at risk of premature labour.

However, the following women should be advised to not actively express colostrum until term gestation:

- Women with threatened/actual premature labour
- Women with a shortened cervix
- Multiple pregnancy before 36/40 weeks
- Women with a cervical suture to protect against premature labour

If you experience any uterine contractions during expressing, you should stop. If these continue, contact your Midwives.

### How do I hand express my colostrum in pregnancy?

#### Preparation

**To prevent cross infection please:**

- Wash your hands thoroughly prior to hand expressing.
- Your breasts need only be washed once a day (avoid soap which can irritate and dry the nipples causing soreness).

| Collecting  |   |
|---|---|
| It is best to collect colostrum in either small sterile syringes or pots with lids. Once the syringe is filled with colostrum, insert it back into its original package and label it with the date and time |   |
| Storing   |   |
| Room  | Can be kept in a sealed container at room temperature for up to 6 hours |
| Fridge  | Can be kept at the back of a fridge (4°C or lower) for up to 5 days     |
| Ice compartment   | Can be stored in an ice compartment of a fridge for 2 weeks             |
| Deep freezer  | Can be stored in a deep freezer (18°C or lower) for 6 months            |
| Defrosting  |   |
| Defrost frozen milk in the fridge overnight (over approximately 12 hours)   |   |
| Use as soon as possible after thawing   |   |
| Milk may be warmed to body temperature by standing the container in warm water for a few minutes. Do NOT use a microwave as this can cause 'hot spots'  |   |
| NEVER refreeze previously frozen milk   |   |
| The Breastfeeding Network (2009)  |   |

### Transporting your expressed colostrum

It is best to freeze your colostrum as you collect it at home and bring it into hospital at the time it is needed.

Use a cool bag with an ice pack for transporting it into hospital and ask a Midwife to put it in the designated fridge as soon as possible on arrival. Frozen colostrum must be used within 12 hours of thawing so to avoid wasting colostrum that has thawed but not used, it is best to only bring in a few syringes at a time.

able to express once your baby is born.

#### Tips to help expressing:

- Try expressing after a warm bath or shower
- Hold warm flannels on your breasts to increase circulation
- Relax!
- Massage your breasts gently before expressing
- Have a scan image of your baby close by

#### What do I need?

You can ask your Community Midwife or Diabetes Midwife for a few sterile syringes to get started. More syringes can be bought in pharmacies or online. 1 ml syringes are best initially.

#### How much should I collect?

Collect as much as you would like to and are able to. Bear in mind that a newborn baby's tummy is the size of a small marble at birth.

#### Storage of antenatal colostrum

There is benefit to the process of expressing colostrum, regardless of whether you choose to store it for the arrival of your baby. However, many women find satisfaction and security in knowing that they have a 'back up' supply of colostrum in case their baby needs it.

Place the syringe in which you have collected colostrum back into its wrapper, and put into a sealable plastic bag (e.g. sandwich or freezer bag). Chill or freeze straight away.

- Have a sterile container for collecting milk, e.g. cup, bottle, wide-necked container or syringe (might be more useful for collecting small amounts of colostrum to ensure that as little as possible is lost).

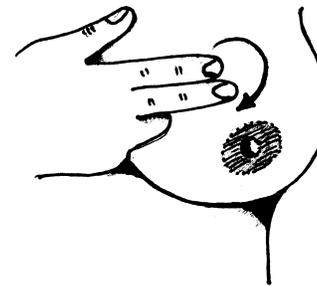
Facilitation of milk flow by encouraging [OXYTOCIN](#) release ('let down' reflex)

You should find a warm, private and relaxing environment.

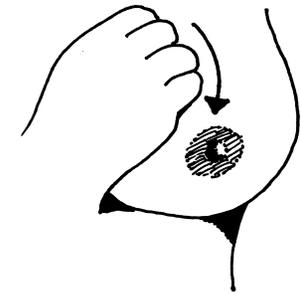
You can gently massage all areas of your breasts for a few minutes prior to expressing (see diagram below for suggested techniques), being careful to avoid sliding your fingers along the breast as this can cause skin damage.

You can gently roll the nipple between your first finger and thumb.

Some women find putting warm flannels to the breasts (or warm water whilst in bath or shower) before expressing can help.



Move fingertips in gentle circular movements



Gently roll closed fist over the breast towards the nipple

## Technique of hand expressing

### Locate the milk ducts

Place your thumb on top of your breast and the first finger opposite on the underside of the breast.

*Either* start as far back on the breast as is comfortable

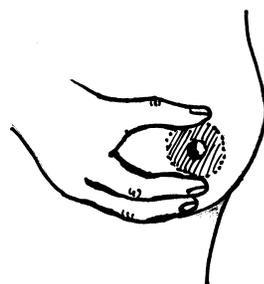
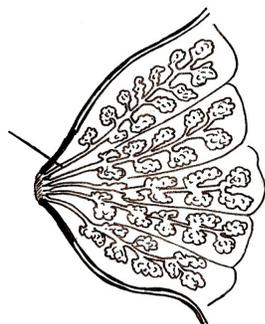
*or* from the base of the nipple gently 'walk' your thumb and fingers until you feel a difference in the texture of the breast.

Now you have located the milk ducts (usually 2 - 3 cm away from the nipple).

### Position

It will help if you are leaning forward slightly.

Place your thumb and first finger at the point where the breast tissue changes texture. The thumb should be at a 12 o'clock position and the first finger at a 6 o'clock position as shown in the diagram (your hand forming a C shape), cupping the breast with your hand.



### To express

Keep your forefinger and thumb in the same place on the skin and gently press backwards towards the chest wall (for large breasts lift first).

Maintaining the backwards pressure, roll your finger and

thumb together easing the milk out of the ducts.

You then need to release the pressure to allow the ducts to refill with milk.

At first, only a few drops may appear but this may increase with practice.

You can rotate the thumb and forefinger position to milk the other areas of the breast, changing hands if necessary.

Collect your beads of colostrum in a sterile syringe or if larger amounts, a sterile cup with a lid. You may find it easier for your partner or family member to assist with this.

Label each syringe with your name, date of birth and date and time of expressing.

Colostrum is normally produced in quite small quantities so don't expect to get great amounts initially, unless you are very fortunate! You may only manage a bead or two but don't give in...every drop counts and the more often you express the more likely your supply will increase. Hand expressing is often more successful than using a manual or electric breast pump.

Colostrum can vary in colour from dark orange/brown, yellow/green to pale/clear. Do not worry if your colostrum changes colour and consistency over a few expressing sessions. This is normal.

Be reassured that colostrum does not 'run out'. You will continue to produce colostrum until your milk 'comes in' (about 3 days after your baby has been born).

You can express as often as you feel comfortable to do so.

### What do I do if I don't get any colostrum?

Don't panic! For some mothers it is not easy to express. Keep trying as it may take a few days before you see a bead of colostrum. If you're happy to continue then keep trying every day. Remember it is not necessary to express whilst you are pregnant but it is useful if you do. Be reassured that you will be