



Patient Information Leaflet

Antenatal expression of colostrum



In the Rotunda Hospital we believe that breastfeeding is a unique interaction between mother and baby which feeds and comforts and also helps prevent against infection and disease.

If it is anticipated that a baby may experience difficulties with feeding or maintaining their blood sugar levels after birth, expressing colostrum antenatally means that your baby will have a supply of breast milk available if required, therefore reducing the need to use infant formula. Please discuss this with your midwife, lactation consultant or doctor for individual advice prior to commencing expressing

Why should I consider antenatal expressing?

- Human milk is the recommended food for all babies, but especially for babies with additional health requirements.
- Expressing and storing colostrum before birth, may decrease the risk of your baby requiring or being given infant formula after birth.
- Expressing can assist in the promotion of successful, exclusive breastfeeding for you and your baby.

What is colostrum and why is it important?

- Colostrum is a fluid which is produced by the breasts from about the twentieth week of pregnancy and during the first few days after the birth of your baby.
- The appearance of colostrum may vary from dark yellow to clear; it can also be quite thick and sticky.
- Colostrum is easily digested and the ideal first food for your baby.
- Colostrum provides perfect nutrition specifically for your newborn baby.
- Colostrum is low in volume but high in energy and helps with the early passage of meconium (baby's first bowel motion) which in turn assists in preventing jaundice (yellow skin colour).

When can I start expressing?

- Generally you may commence expressing from 37 completed weeks gestation or 2 weeks before baby is due .

You should stop expressing immediately if you are having contractions at any time.

How often can I express?

You can express your milk as often as you want approx. 3 – 4 times a day for approx. 5 mins.

How much colostrum will I get?

The amount you get will vary from a few drops to a teaspoon. This small amount is perfect for your baby. Colostrum your first breastmilk is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby fight infections.

Expressing and collecting colostrum

For details on how to hand express, refer to HSE booklet-Breastfeeding and Expressing for your Preterm or Sick Baby (P.11-15)

Collecting and storing your colostrum

- Initially collect the colostrum in the syringes provided for this purpose.
- Use a new syringe for each expression
- When milk ceases to flow, rotate the position of your fingers and thumb around the areola (imagine a clock face) and repeat the expressing process.
- Swap to the other breast when the flow slows down or after two to three minutes.
- Use each breast twice during each expressing session.
- Colostrum can be collected and stored in a capped syringe in the fridge, however not in the door of the fridge.
- At the end of the collecting day, the colostrum can be frozen, if necessary. See breastmilk storage details below.
- Place the syringe into a zip-lock bag before putting into the freezer.
- Label the syringe and bag (separately) with a computer generated sticker and record the date and time of expression of colostrum on the sticker

Your colostrum will remain frozen/ chilled until the time comes for your baby's birth at which time the containers can be brought to hospital labelled with your name, hospital record number, date and time the colostrum was expressed.

Storage

Expressed breastmilk / colostrum can be stored for ;

- 5 days in the fridge (not in the door)
- 3 months in a drawer freezer
- 6 months in a deep freezer

Transporting colostrum to hospital

Your expressed colostrum (fresh or frozen) must be transported to hospital in a cooler pack with ice blocks to maintain the temperature.

Initially, only bring approx. 4 syringes to hospital.

There is a special fridge available on the ward for storing expressed breast milk.

Frozen colostrum will defrost in the refrigerator . Once fully defrosted colostrum must be used by 24 hrs or discarded.

Expressing packs contain

- 6 x 1ml colostrum collection syringes
- Information leaflet on how to express breastmilk
- Patient stickers
- Expressing log
- Colostrum expression leaflet
- HSE Booklet: Breastfeeding and Expressing for your Preterm or Sick Baby