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Sherwood Forest Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Antenatal hand expressing and colostrum collection

Information for women and birthing parents



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Why collect colostrum during pregnancy?

Collecting some of your milk before the birth of your baby (from 36 weeks, unless you have risk factors for premature labour) can be useful if your baby needs some extra help with feeding in the early days. You can collect colostrum however you intend to feed your baby.

Colostrum (the first milk produced from 16 weeks of pregnancy and after birth) helps to stabilise blood glucose levels and is high in infection fighting properties, including antibodies. It is useful to have colostrum available when:

- You have diabetes or have taken labetalol (a blood pressure medicine) in pregnancy.
- Your baby is premature, small birth weight, ill, twins/triplets or has a condition such as a heart defect or cleft palate.

Pick up a colostrum collection kit from King's Mill Hospital's maternity ward reception (1st floor).

How to hand express:

1. Wash your hands. Have a sterile pot with blue lid ready to express directly into. If you have bought your own syringes they need a bung/cap to ensure safe storage in our freezer. **IMPORTANT** bungs/caps must **ALWAYS** be removed before giving milk to baby, as they are a choking hazard.
2. It helps if you stimulate hormone release to increase the milk flow by gently massaging your breasts/chest prior to expressing.
3. Next place your thumb and finger about 2-3cm from the base of the nipple.
4. Hold your first finger and thumb in a c-shape, using the soft pads of your fingers. Compress them together, gently squeezing and releasing in a steady rhythm – this should not hurt.
5. Drops of colostrum will appear gradually. If colostrum does not drip after a few minutes, try moving your fingers slightly towards the nipple, or further away and try again.



6. Avoid sliding your fingers forward as this can damage your skin and can be uncomfortable. Collect any drops in a sterile storage pot.
7. When the drops slow down, move your fingers round to express a different section of your breast/ chest and compress and release.
8. When drops of colostrum begin to slow or stop, move to the other breast and repeat the process. Continue to collect in the same pot.
9. Please label every pot/syringe individually with a separate handwritten sticker on each pot/syringe – we cannot store milk which is incorrectly labelled.
10. When you give your milk to baby we do not recommend using a bottle if you are planning to breast/chestfeed.



Instead staff can show you how to safely offer milk via syringe or feeding cup – up to 5mls of milk via syringe (with the bung/cap removed before feeding baby); or you can use a sterile feeding cup for amounts over 5mls, or after day 3.

How to store colostrum

- Colostrum can be stored in the same sterile syringe/pot when expressed in a 24-hour period.
- Use a new sterile syringe/pot each day.
- Label each individual pot/ syringe with your name and the date and time of the expressing session.
- Once filled, store the pot/ syringes in a zip-lock bag in your freezer. Colostrum can be stored in your fridge (4 degrees or lower) for 48 hours, or for up to 6 months in a large freezer (-18 degrees or lower). (Breastfeeding Network, 2019).

What if I get some tightening?

Towards the end of your pregnancy you may start to feel your bump going hard and then softening; this is your womb tightening and relaxing. These are called Braxton Hicks contractions and are quite normal. These tightenings may also occur when you express.

Stop expressing if they become painful and more regular; tightenings are likely to settle once you stop expressing. It is unlikely that expressing will trigger labour, however, if they don't stop and you think labour may have started, contact the Sherwood Birthing Unit for advice (the contact number is in the 'Further information' section).

When and how often should I express?

Start expressing from 36 weeks unless you have risk factors for premature pregnancy (then wait till 37 weeks). While you are pregnant, you can express for a few minutes, two or three times a day. Please do not worry if you are unable to hand express during pregnancy – it is an option and not a requirement – hand expressing in the antenatal period has no effect on milk production when baby is born.

When and how do I bring my milk into hospital?

When your frozen colostrum is brought into hospital, remember to bring it in a cool bag with an ice pack. Please label every pot individually.

Let your midwife know you have milk which needs to be frozen immediately so that it can then be transferred to a freezer to prevent it from defrosting too soon. If you've not used your colostrum before you go home, please remember to ask for it to take with you. If you do not ask for it, we will dispose of milk left in our freezer after you leave the hospital.

Further information

If you have any questions please speak to your midwife or ring the hospital and ask to speak to the:

- Specialist midwife for infant feeding – 01623 622515, extension 6095.
- Specialist midwife for diabetes – 01623 622515, extension 6095.
- Sherwood Birthing Unit – 01623 672244.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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