

## Collecting Colostrum While You're Pregnant

### What is colostrum and why is it important?

- Colostrum is a fluid the breast makes from about the 20th week of pregnancy, up to the first few days after your baby is born.
- Colostrum is easy for your baby to digest—it's the ideal first food for your baby.
- It can range from dark yellow to clear, and can be quite thick and sticky.
- Colostrum gives the nutrition that all newborns need. It has a lot more protein than mature milk. Some of these proteins called antibodies help make your baby's immune system stronger.
- Colostrum has fat-soluble vitamins, some minerals, and salt. All help to protect your baby from becoming dehydrated in the first few days, before breastfeeding is established.
- While the breast doesn't make large amounts, colostrum is high in energy and helps the meconium pass (the baby's first bowel movement), which then helps prevent jaundice.

### Why should I think about expressing colostrum by hand?

- Breastmilk is the recommended food for all babies, especially for babies with more health needs.
- In some cases, babies need to be fed shortly after birth, for example, babies with low blood sugar.

By expressing colostrum by hand (antenatal expression) and bringing it with you to the hospital, you'll have this ideal food source ready for your baby, if needed.

- Mothers who collect colostrum while they're pregnant have more success establishing and maintaining breastfeeding.

### When can I start expressing colostrum?

Doctors usually recommend you start when you're at least 37 weeks pregnant. You do not want to express before 37 weeks as it can stimulate contractions.

### How do I hand express colostrum?

Put warm compresses on your breasts or begin expressing after a bath or shower, as the heat may help the colostrum flow better. It may take a few days of practice before you start seeing a few drops of colostrum.

It's strongly recommended that you watch the Stanford Hand Expression video at:

<http://med.stanford.edu/newborns/professional-education/breastfeeding/hand-expressing-milk.html>

Note: This video shows expressing milk after the baby is born. You will likely only make a small amount of colostrum while you're pregnant, and that's normal.

### Before You Start

- Go to your pharmacy and buy syringes that hold 3 to 5 mL of liquid. You'll use the syringes to collect the colostrum after you express it.
- Make sure the cup or spoon you're using to collect the colostrum is clean and sterile.

## **Getting Started**

1. Wash your hands.
2. Sit in a comfortable, upright position, leaning slightly forward.
3. Start with a gentle breast massage, stroking from the back of your breast towards the nipple.
4. Gently press your finger and thumb pads (not your fingertips) on the border of your areola back toward the chest wall and into the breast tissue, then press them together and hold for a few seconds (see Figure 1). Your fingers should be well back from your nipple, on the border of your areola, and shouldn't tug or drag on your nipple. Don't squeeze or pinch your nipple.
5. Repeat, using a rhythm like that of a baby suckling at the breast. Expressing should be comfortable. Speak to your doctor if you have any discomfort or concerns, as you may need to see a lactation consultant.

## **When the Colostrum Starts Flowing**

When you can see the colostrum, collect it with the clean cup or spoon (see Figure 2). There might only be a few drops from the nipple or it will be dripping easily.

1. When the colostrum stops flowing, rotate the position of your fingers and thumb around the areola and repeat the expressing process.
2. Switch to the other breast when the flow slows down or after 2 to 3 minutes.
3. Express on each breast twice during a session.

## **When You're Done Collecting**

1. Collect the expressed colostrum from the clean cup or spoon using a syringe.
2. Label the syringe with your name, the date, and the time(s) you expressed.
3. Place the syringe in a freezer bag in the fridge until you're done collecting for the day. You can express colostrum 2 to 3 times each day.
4. At the end of the day, put the freezer bag in the freezer. The frozen colostrum can be stored for up to:
  - 4 months in a 2-door fridge or side-by-side fridge/freezer
  - 12 months in a deep freezer

## **Colostrum must be used within 24 hours after it's been thawed.**

Bringing the Colostrum to the Hospital

1. Make sure everything is still labeled.
2. Put the freezer bag of syringes in a cooler or in a bag full of ice before bringing it to the hospital. Make sure the colostrum doesn't thaw before you get it to the hospital.
3. Tell your health care provider you brought frozen colostrum, so it can be put in the breastmilk fridge.

Note: If your baby needs the colostrum, you'll give about 3 to 15 mL. Not all hospitals have a freezer to keep your colostrum frozen during your stay, and all colostrum must be used within 24 hours of thawing.