

Patient information

Expressing and storing colostrum during pregnancy



The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that babies are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of their life until solid food is introduced. After this you are encouraged to breastfeed alongside the introduction of solid food until your baby decides to stop. West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust promotes and supports breastfeeding as the healthiest way to feed your baby.

Is breast feeding for me?

Consider the ABC of why breastfeeding is recommended:

Availability: Frequently offering the breast for feeding, combined with effective positioning and attachment, will encourage your body to produce breastmilk that is made specifically for your baby's needs. This milk contains the nutrients required for healthy development and is readily available at the time your baby wants to feed. No need for equipment or preparation.

Benefits: Breastmilk contains immunological factors, hormones and growth factors that are not found in formula milk. These help to protect your baby from many diseases during the period of breastfeeding including a reduction in the incidence and severity of ear, chest and gut infections.

The incidence of diabetes, obesity and heart disease is higher in formula fed babies and there is emerging evidence of enhanced development of the brain and nerve pathways in breastfed babies. For mum protection from breast and ovarian cancer and osteoporosis is increased.

Continuity and Responsiveness: Your baby has experienced the shelter, warmth and comfort found inside your uterus throughout pregnancy and at birth faces the challenges of adapting to a new environment. A more gentle adaptation is assisted by

placing your baby skin to skin, being alert to feeding cues and offering the breast for food, comfort and security.

Why may I need to express colostrum (early breastmilk) before my baby is born?

Most women don't but for if you are a mother with diabetes your baby is likely to be at particular risk of low blood glucose (sugar) in the first few hours after birth and, if left unchecked, this can make them ill. By breastfeeding your baby promptly and frequently it is less likely that they will show signs of illness and decreases the likelihood of exposure to formula milk.

Staff will provide advice, support and encouragement to enable you to breastfeed as soon after birth as possible. Should your baby be unable to breastfeed, or the blood glucose falls significantly, it would be helpful to have expressed colostrum available so that it can be given instead of formula milk. The ideal time to do this is before your baby is born from between 36 - 37 weeks of pregnancy using the technique of hand expression.

If you have insulin dependent diabetes insulin requirements in the postnatal period will often be less than pre-pregnancy doses placing you at increased risk of hypoglycaemia, especially when breastfeeding. Be alert and ask for guidance if you are concerned.

What is colostrum?

Colostrum is the thick and sticky early breastmilk that you begin to produce during pregnancy and for the first few days after birth. You will make small quantities at first, often less than a millilitre at each feed or expression, and this volume of colostrum is usually adequate for the needs of a healthy baby born at term. It can be almost transparent, or within the range of light to deep yellow in colour.

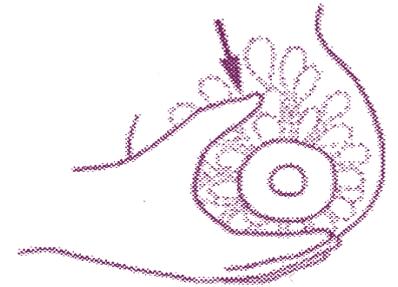
Colostrum contains everything your baby needs in the first few days and is particularly rich in a sugar that can help to stabilise blood glucose levels. The digestion of colostrum acts as a gentle laxative and assists your baby's gastrointestinal tract to colonise with healthy bacteria.

How can I hand express colostrum whilst pregnant?

The '**Mothers and others guide**' provided by your community midwife contains detailed information and visual images to help you to hand express (squeeze) colostrum out of your breast. Here are a few basic pointers:

- It is best to be relaxed before attempting to hand express. Taking a bath, shower, using a relaxation or massage technique may help.
- Ensure your hands have been thoroughly washed and dried.
- Collect the colostrum in a sterile container. The syringes or colostrum harvesting pots provided by antenatal clinic or your community midwife are ideal.
- Gently stroke or massage your breast in all areas:

Cup your breast making a C shape with your thumb and index finger behind the darker part of your breast, about one inch from the base of the nipple. Firmly press the thumb and forefinger together for about two seconds, release and start again (this should not hurt). Repeat in a rhythmic way, press - hold - release, intermittently repositioning your fingers around the breast until **drops** of a thick sticky substance (colostrum) flow.



- When the flow of colostrum stops repeat on the second breast. Label the sample with name (MRN), date and time of expression using the stickers provided. Leave a small air space in the syringe before placing the cap on to allow for expansion during freezing.

When you express you may feel your womb going hard and relaxing ('Braxton Hicks' contractions). This is common in late pregnancy and when expressing. If this tightening begins to feel like period-type cramps or mild labour contractions stop expressing and rest. If they continue or you think you might be in early labour, you should telephone the Labour Suite on 01284 713272 as you have been advised.

How much colostrum will I get and how often should I hand express?

The amount you get will range from an initial few drops to a teaspoon or more of often thick, sticky liquid with a clear or yellow colour. Express by hand as often as you feel comfortable, perhaps start with once or twice and build up to more frequent expressions.

The nutrient content of colostrum is high and its composition changes over 24 hours so you may wish to express in the evening / overnight as part of your pattern.

How do I store my expressed milk

Once you have collected and labelled the expressed colostrum place the syringe in a clean bag or container, further syringes can be added, and place in either

- Your fridge towards the back away from warming air currents at a temperature of 2 - 4°C for up to 24 hours. Within this timescale colostrum can be transferred to the freezer.

OR

- Your freezer to the back or base away from changes in the optimum temperature of -18°C. Frozen colostrum should not be stored beyond the timescale recommended by the manufacturer of your freezer.

How do I transport my colostrum to West Suffolk

Please be advised that there is limited freezer and fridge storage capacity at West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust. Frozen colostrum brought in from home will be stored in either the small freezer on F11 as space allows or, in the ward breastmilk fridge for up to 24 hours. It is recommended that your birth partner initially brings in up to five syringes following the steps below. **If you are unsure that you are in labour, or attending for induction you may wish to leave the syringes at home for collection at a later time.**

For transport purpose follow the four basic steps below:

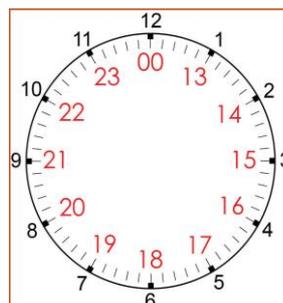
Place fresh/
frozen colostrum
surrounded by
ice packs in a
cool bag for
transport.



On arrival hand
colostrum to your
midwife for
labelling and
placing in the
ward milk
***fridge.**



Previously
frozen
colostrum may
remain in the
ward fridge for
up to 24 hours.



Previously
frozen colostrum
exposed to room
temperature
should be used
within 1 hour or
discarded.



West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)
<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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