

PATIENT INFORMATION

Antenatal Hand Expressing

This leaflet is intended to be used to support discussion with a midwife or doctor when you have decided that you would like to try and express and store colostrum for your baby during the antenatal period. You should not start this practice until you have spoken to your midwife or a member of your hospital obstetric team. If there is anything you do not understand or are unsure about, please speak to a member of maternity staff.

WHY HAND EXPRESS?

- Antenatal hand expression can help you prepare for breastfeeding.
- It can help you become familiar with your breasts and how they produce milk.
- Once you have identified the position of your milk ducts, this can help you appreciate where your baby's mouth needs to be for effective attachment when breastfeeding.
- Any colostrum expressed whilst you are pregnant can be stored and used when your baby is born. (Refrigerator or freezer depending on the length of time milk is to be stored).
- practicing this skill helps you to get better at it.
- If you are Diabetic or have had diabetes during pregnancy, having colostrum available to give to your baby if they won't feed immediately after birth will help reduce the risk of your baby having low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia).
- Having expressed colostrum available for the first few feeds may avoid the use of infant formula supplements. Research suggests that babies who are exclusively breastfed are less likely to develop diabetes themselves (Cox, 2006).

WHAT IS COLOSTRUM?

Colostrum is the first golden/yellow coloured milk that you produce during pregnancy and for the first few days when your baby is born. It is a concentrated form of food for your baby and comes in very small quantities. Newborn babies usually feed little and often because of their stomach size.

Be reassured that some women do not leak colostrum during pregnancy or may not be able to hand express any colostrum in the antenatal period. This does not mean that you will not produce milk when your baby is born.

WHEN TO START ANTENATAL HAND EXPRESSING

Currently there is no evidence to suggest that hand expressing before your baby is born is unsafe. You can be taught how to hand express at any time during your pregnancy. However, you are advised not to commence hand expressing before you have reached the 37th week of your pregnancy.

If you know that your baby is going to be born before 37 weeks, you must first discuss this with your Consultant Obstetrician, Diabetes Specialist Midwife or the Infant Feeding Co-ordinator.

You should be taught how to hand express by a trained member of midwifery or nursing staff. Using a knitted or fabric breast for visual understanding is useful. You should also be given the Department of Health Leaflet "Off to the Best Start" or you can view the video on hand expressing on the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly website: www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly

Women with any of the following should not hand express in the antenatal period:

- Any history of antepartum haemorrhage (bleeding during pregnancy) or placenta praevia (with or without any antenatal bleeding).
- Any known medical reason that is not compatible with breastfeeding.

HOW TO HAND EXPRESS COLOSTRUM

1. Before you start, make sure your hands are clean and that you have a sterilised container or syringe to collect and store any colostrum.
2. Gentle breast massage can be used to help make expressing easier. Being relaxed and as comfortable as possible will make a difference, warm flannels placed over the breasts or a warm bath may help.
3. Gently feel the breast to find the right spot. Starting at the nipple, feel back to where the texture of the breast feels different (this is usually 2-3cm back from the nipple but can vary).
4. Cup the breast. Using the thumb and rest of fingers in a C shape, gently compress then release this area. Initially it may take a few minutes for drops of colostrum to appear.
5. If colostrum does not flow, try moving fingers slightly away



or towards the nipple and try again.

6. Don't worry if colostrum does not flow. Practicing this skill will help stimulate production.
7. Once the colostrum stops, rotate thumb and fingers to a different section of the breast and repeat.
8. Repeat this process for the other breast.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I HAND EXPRESS BEFORE MY BABY IS BORN?

It is recommended that you should hand express for a short period of time, 2 – 3 times per day. This can be collected in the same syringe as long as the syringe is capped off and is stored in the refrigerator inbetween expressing. At the end of each collecting day, the colostrum should be labelled and frozen.

SAFE COLLECTION AND STORAGE OF HAND EXPRESSED COLOSTRUM

Once you have hand expressed and collected colostrum in the syringe provided, the syringe should be labelled with your name, date of birth, date and time of expressing, using labels provided. If you have done this at home, the capped syringe containing colostrum should be placed in a zip lock bag and stored in a freezer (-18°C). Colostrum expressed in hospital can be stored in the refrigerator on the Neonatal Unit for 48 hours or can be frozen if it is anticipated that it will not be used in 48 hours.

Any colostrum that is brought into the Hospital must be correctly labelled (each syringe) or it cannot be used.

TRANSFERRING COLOSTRUM FROM HOME TO HOSPITAL

When it is time for you to come into hospital to have your baby, you should place your frozen, pre-labelled colostrum with a frozen cool block in a cool bag and bring it to hospital with you. On arrival at the Maternity Unit, you should give it to the midwife immediately where it can be stored in the freezer on the Neonatal Unit. Colostrum defrosted in the refrigerator must be used within 12 hours. If defrosted outside the refrigerator, it should be used immediately (Breastfeeding Network [accessed 20:04:15]). Once removed from the freezer, the colostrum should be labelled with the date and time of removal.

ANY CONDITION, SPECIFIC DANGER, SIGNALS TO LOOK OUT FOR

If, at any time, you notice red or inflamed areas on your breast, or firm, tender lumps that persist after expressing, please inform a member of nursing or midwifery staff or speak to your GP.

Note – you may find that when you hand express you experience Braxton Hicks contractions. This is when your uterus goes hard and then relaxes. These are nothing to worry about unless they begin to feel like period-type cramps or early labour contractions. This is rare and you should stop expressing and rest. If they do not stop then you should contact Triage on 01695 656604.

REFERENCES

1. Breastfeeding Network Leaflet accessed April 2015
www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/pdfs/BFNEpressing and Storing.pdf
2. Cox, S (2006) Expressing and storing colostrum antenatally for use in the newborn period. Breastfeeding Review, 14 (3, 11-16)

USEFUL NUMBERS

1. Ormskirk Maternity Unit Infant Feeding Coordinator
01695 656379 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)
2. Families and Babies (FAB)
Breastfeeding Peer Support Service (West Lancashire)
Tel: 01254 772929 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)
www.familiesandbabies.org.uk
3. Knowsley Breastfeeding Buddies
Breastfeeding Peer Support Service (Knowsley)
Tel 0151 514 2666 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)
4. Breastfeeding Support Sefton
Tel 0151 291 8010 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)
5. Department of Health National Breastfeeding Helpline
0300 100 0212
www.breastfeeding.nhs.uk
Run by Association of Breastfeeding Mothers and Breastfeeding Network

During your contact with us, it is important that you are happy with your care and treatment. Please speak to a member of staff and/or the ward/department Sister/Charge Nurse if you have questions or concerns.

MATRON

A Matron is also available during the hours of 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. During these periods, ward/department staff can contact Matron to arrange to meet with you. Out of hours, a Senior Nurse can be contacted via the ward/department to deal with any concerns you may have.

INFECTION CONTROL REQUEST

Preventing infections is a crucial part of our patients' care. To ensure that our standards remain high our staff have regular infection prevention and control training and their practice is monitored in the workplace. We ask patients and visitors to assist us in preventing infections by cleaning their hands at regular intervals and informing staff of areas within the hospital that appear soiled.

As a patient there may be times that you are unsure whether a staff member has cleaned their hands; if in doubt please ask the staff member and they will be only too happy to put your mind at ease by cleaning their hands so that you can see them.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS

ANY CONDITION SPECIFIC DANGER SIGNALS TO LOOK OUT FOR:

CONTACT INFORMATION IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR CONDITION

- Your own GP

OTHER USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS/CONTACTS:

NHS 111

Stop Smoking Helpline (Sefton) – 0300 100 1000

Stop Smoking Helpline (West Lancashire) – 0800 328 6297

**Please call 01704 704714 if you need
this leaflet in an alternative format**

Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust

Ormskirk & District General Hospital
Wigan Road, Ormskirk, L39 2AZ

Tel: (01695) 577111

Southport & Formby District General Hospital
Town Lane, Kew, Southport, PR8 6PN

Tel: (01704) 547471

FOR APPOINTMENTS

Telephone (01695) 656680
Email soh-tr.appointments@nhs.net

Author: Lesley Fawcett
Ref: 17/12
Version: 3
Reviewed: February 2023
Review Date: February 2026