

**NHS Forth Valley**

# **Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting**

**A guide for women on hand expressing  
colostrum during pregnancy**

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of two light blue, wavy, ribbon-like shapes that curve upwards and meet at a point in the center, set against a white background with a subtle gradient.

## Precautions to Know Before You Start

It is not recommended to start colostrum harvesting before 36 weeks of pregnancy. This is because expressing could trigger some contractions or Braxton Hicks. If you experience any contractions while hand expressing, you should stop and rest. Contact maternity triage on 01324 567098 if the contractions do not stop after a couple of hours, or you have any other concerns.

You should not express if any of the following apply to you. If you are unsure whether it is safe for you to express your colostrum, check with your midwife first.

- You have ever had a cervical suture
- You have ever had a preterm labour
- You have a low lying placenta called placenta praevia
- You are pregnant with twins, triplets, or more
- You have polyhydramnios (too much fluid around the baby)

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*Colostrum is packed full of nutrients for your baby. It might be watery, or thick like syrup, and can be a range of colours from clear to cream to yellow or even brown.*

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## When Can I Start To Express?

It is recommended to start colostrum harvesting from 36 – 37 weeks. This can be done between one and three times per day for up to 10 minutes each time. You do not need to express every day.

Colostrum is produced in very small volumes. Some women don't see any droplets whilst others can get 2mls or more. Don't worry as this does not indicate how successful breastfeeding will be!

## How Do I Express By Hand?



### Step 1

Wash your hands thoroughly.

Ensure you are in a private space and comfortable.

To encourage a milk flow, start by gently massaging your breast and nipple to stimulate the hormones needed to release milk.



### Step 2

Position your thumb and fingers in a 'C' shape, 2 to 3cm back from the base of your nipple.



### Step 3

Gently press and release, press and release, and keep repeating until your milk starts to flow. This may take a few minutes.

You may not see anything at all, or maybe just a glistening on the surface of your nipple.



### Step 4

When the flow slows down, move your fingers round to a different part of your breast and start again.

## Collecting and Storing Your Expressed Milk

Your expressing pack should include some sterile syringes, like the ones pictured. If you need more, please ask your midwife.



As you express, gently suck the droplets of colostrum into the syringe. Some women prefer to express into a sterile container or gallipot and then draw it up into the syringe for storing. You can add milk into the same syringe for 24 hours but keep the syringe in the fridge between uses and freeze at the end of the day.

Label each syringe with: your name, your CHI number (or date of birth if you don't know it) and the date you expressed.

Place labelled syringes into a plastic food storage bag and store:

- In the fridge (0 – 4 °C) for up to 5 days
- In the freezer compartment of a fridge for up to 2 weeks
- In a freezer (-18 °C) for up to 6 months

*Note: We recommend freezing your milk as soon as possible.*

## Bringing Your Colostrum Into Hospital

When transporting to hospital, place in a cool bag with freezer pack, cool blocks or ice. Inform staff immediately on your arrival so that it can be appropriately stored for you until required.

## Further Reading and Information



How to Hand  
Express Video



Gestational  
Diabetes Website



Association of  
Breastfeeding Mothers

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### If you can't go let us know!

Every month around 2,000 people across Forth Valley fail to turn up for hospital appointments. This costs the NHS millions of pounds each year and increases waiting times. So if you are unable to attend or no longer require your hospital appointment please let us know so we can offer it to someone else.

**Smoking** is not permitted anywhere on our hospital grounds and it is now an offence to smoke within 15 metres of a hospital building. This can result in a fixed penalty notice of £50 or a fine of up to £1,000.



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