

# Colostrum harvesting/expressing your milk in the antenatal period

## Patient Information

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## Expressing your milk during the antenatal period

Wrightington Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust is committed to promoting and supporting breastfeeding as the healthiest way to feed your baby. We believe that breastfeeding should be recognised as a unique interaction between mother and baby which not only feeds and comforts but also helps prevent against infection and disease.

It is well known that exclusive breastfeeding (that means your baby has your milk and nothing else to eat or drink) for around the first 6 months has many health benefits.

### Why should I express my milk antenatally?

Any expectant mother can express her breast milk from 37 weeks gestation. It is particularly useful if you know that your baby is at an increased risk of having a low blood sugar in the first few hours after birth. This can include:

- Women with diabetes in pregnancy (pre-existing or gestational).
- Infants diagnosed during the antenatal period with cleft lip and/or palate and congenital conditions.
- Mothers having an elective caesarean section.
- Infants with intrauterine growth restriction.
- Women with breast hypoplasia (Underdeveloped breasts).
- Women with hyperandrogenesis (polycystic ovarian disease).
- Women who have had breast surgery.
- Women with multiple sclerosis.
- Strong family history of dairy intolerance or inflammatory bowel disease.
- Mothers with high blood pressure.
- Mothers taking beta blockers (e.g. labetalol).
- Previous unsatisfactory breastfeeding journey

It would be helpful if you have already expressed some of your breast milk, so that if your baby does need extra milk, this can be given to them instead of formula milk. The ideal time to do this is before your baby is born.

### Diabetes and allergic conditions

Mothers with a family history of dairy intolerance, inflammatory bowel disease or diabetes are more likely to have babies who develop these conditions if they are exposed to cows' milk early in infancy.

- Babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop childhood diabetes.

- It is thought that cows' milk (the main ingredient of formula milk) can trigger diabetes in some babies; this is probably more likely for your baby if you or your partner have diabetes. Therefore, it is very important that mothers who are diabetic avoid giving their baby formula milk if possible until the baby is at least 6 months old.
- If you have diabetes and are insulin dependent, you may find that you need less insulin when you are breastfeeding and that you need to eat more.
- If you have gestational diabetes, you are less likely to go on to develop diabetes in later life if you breastfeed your baby.

## Contraindications

**There is no evidence that daily hand expression of colostrum can trigger labour for women who are not known to be at risk of premature labour**

The antenatal expression of colostrum is contraindicated in the following circumstances:

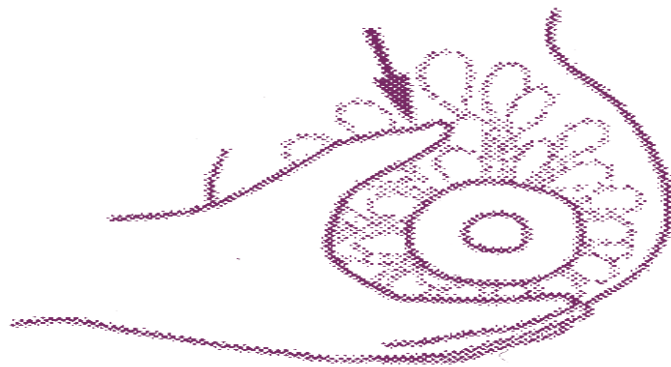
- History of threatened/ actual premature labour
- Cervical incompetence
- Multiple pregnancy
- Cervical suture insitu

If you experience any uterine contractions during expressing, you should stop. If these continue, please contact your midwives.

## How to express your breast milk

Hand expressing milk simply means squeezing milk out of your breast and this is how you do it:

1. Cup your breast with your hand and feel back from the end of the nipple to where the texture of your breast feels different.
2. Using your thumb and index finger gently squeeze this area. It should not hurt.
3. Release the pressure then repeat again and again building up a rhythm. Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin.
4. Milk should start to flow. The first milk, colostrum, is very concentrated. It is very thick and will come out of your breast drop by drop.
5. If the milk does not flow, try moving your fingers slightly toward the nipple or slightly further away to find the spot that works best for you.



6. When the flow slows down move your fingers around the breast (like moving around the numbers on a clock face) so that you have expressed the milk from all the way around your breast.
7. Express from the other breast.
8. If you wish to see hand expressing online, please visit:  
[www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/)

### How often can I express?

You can express your milk as often as you want to, but we would recommend at least four times a day.

### How much breast milk will I get?

The amount of breast milk you get will vary from a few drops to a tea spoon. This small amount is perfect for your baby as colostrum is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby fight infections.

You may find when you express you feel your womb going hard and then relaxing, these are braxton-hicks contractions. Do not worry about these unless they begin to feel like period type cramps or mild labour contractions. This is rare but if it happens you should stop expressing and rest.

If they do not stop and you think you may be in early labour you should telephone the delivery suite on the telephone number on the front of your notes as advised by your midwife (01942 778505).

### How to store your expressed milk

It is best to freeze your colostrum as you collect it at home and bring it into hospital at the time it is needed. You will need to collect the milk in clean containers. Your midwifery team will provide you with small syringes that you can use to store the milk in. The syringe can then be put into a small plastic bag and labelled with your name, date and time you expressed.

Syringes and packs can also be collected from Infant Feeding Team 01942 778557 or antenatal clinics.

You can store the milk in the fridge at a temperature of 2-4 degrees centigrade for 3-5 days or in the freezer for up to 6 months. If you do not know the temperature of your fridge at home store for 48 hours only.

**If you start expressing at 37 weeks, it will probably be best to store the milk in the freezer.**

## **When you come to have your baby**

Do not forget to bring any breast milk you have expressed with you. Let your midwife know you have it with you and she will arrange for it to be stored in the fridge/ or in the freezer if already frozen. If your breast milk is frozen then the best way to transport it is in a cool bag with a blue ice block. Frozen breast milk needs to remain frozen until needed, so please give to your midwife on admission to hospital.

## **Contacts/Further information**

If you require further information regarding the evidence printed in this leaflet, please contact the Infant Feeding Team on 01942 778569 or 01942 778557 or refer to:

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/>

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## Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

## Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

The Patient Relations/PALS Manager  
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust  
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## Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



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## How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use and store the information we hold about you, please take a look at our “how we use your information” leaflet which can be found on the Trust website: <https://www.wwl.nhs.uk>

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This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, Braille and other languages upon request. For more information please ask in the department/ward.

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**Call 111 first when it's less urgent than 999.**



Phone: 0808 802 1212  
Text: 81212  
[www.veteransgateway.org.uk](http://www.veteransgateway.org.uk)

