

Hand Expressing Breast Milk Before Your Baby is Born

- **Breast milk is the best food for your baby.** Babies should not have anything but breast milk for the first 6 months of life, if possible.
- **Colostrum** is the breast milk that your body makes during your pregnancy and for the first few days after your baby's birth.
- Colostrum:
 - › can be clear to golden yellow in colour.
 - › is often very thick.
 - › is made in small amounts, but it is usually all your baby needs for the first few days after birth.
- Your baby may need a supplement (extra nutrition) for the first few days after birth. You can give them more colostrum so that you do not have to use other supplements, like formula.
- Babies who are more likely to need a supplement include:
 - › Babies born to people with diabetes, thyroid disease, or other hormonal imbalances, like polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)
 - › Babies born to people who have had breast surgery
 - › Babies born to people with a history of low breast milk supply
 - › Babies born by cesarean section (C-section)
 - › Preterm and small babies
- **It is important to learn how to hand express your breast milk.** Hand expression works much better than using a pump to remove colostrum from your breasts while you are pregnant and in the first few days after your baby's birth. It is the best way to remove colostrum.

- You should learn how to hand express your breast milk at about 36 weeks of pregnancy. If your pregnancy care provider says it is OK, you can start collecting your colostrum at 37 weeks to bring with you when you come to the hospital to give birth. This video shows how to hand express:
 - › www.healthlinkbc.ca/pregnancy-parenting/parenting-babies-0-12-months/breastfeeding/video-hand-expressing-breastmilk



To scan the QR code, open the camera on your device, point the camera at the code, and tap the banner or border that appears.

Remember to bring your colostrum with you when you come to the hospital to give birth. This can be easy to forget when you are distracted by labour. You may wish to leave a note on your hospital bag to remind you.

Bring your colostrum in an insulated bag or cooler with ice and/or ice packs to keep it cold. Remember to give it to your nurse when you arrive. It will be kept in a freezer until it is needed.

- **Before you start hand expressing your milk, check with your pregnancy care provider to make sure it is safe for you.** If it is safe, follow the instructions below.

How to hand express breast milk:

You may wish to follow along with the video (see above) when you are first learning.

It may help to:

- › Practice hand expressing each day in the shower before you start collecting.
 - › Place a wet, warm cloth on your breasts a few minutes before starting.
1. **Always wash your hands before hand expressing or handling your expressed colostrum.**
 2. Gently massage 1 breast toward the nipple. Gently roll or tug on the nipple.
 3. Place your thumb and index finger in a C-shape just outside the dark area of your breast (areola).
 4. Push your thumb and index finger back towards your chest and gently squeeze, then release.
 5. Keep squeezing and releasing steadily until drops of colostrum appear. Move your hand all the way around the areola so that you reach all of the milk ducts.

**Hand expression is a learned skill. It will get easier with practice.
Do not worry if you do not get a lot of colostrum. It is normal to only get a few drops.**

6. As drops of colostrum appear, you can collect them:
- › directly into a syringe.
 - or
 - › into the small cup you were given. Then add them to the syringe when you are done.

When you are done collecting, remember to put the cap on the end of the syringe to protect the colostrum from germs.

7. Repeat steps 1 to 6 on your other breast.
8. Hand express each breast for 3 to 5 minutes, 2 to 3 times a day.

- Oxytocin (a hormone) is released during hand expression. It also causes your uterus (place where your baby grows) to contract during labour.
- **If you have any cramping in your uterus when hand expressing, it is very important to stop and talk with your pregnancy care provider before starting again.** This is rare.
- It is safe to keep breastfeeding your older child while pregnant.

9. **Use a new syringe each day.** Label the syringe with your name and the date it was collected.

Keep the colostrum that you express for the first time each day in the fridge. Make sure that any other colostrum you express the same day cools to room temperature before you add it to the syringe.

Within 24 hours (1 day) of collection, put the syringe in the freezer.

Never add fresh colostrum to frozen colostrum.

You may notice you are expressing more colostrum each day.

**What are your questions?
Please ask a member of your health care
team. We are here to help you.**

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