

## Antenatal Expressing: Information sheet for women

**Disclaimer: This information sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.**

The nutritional and immunological benefits of breastfeeding are important for all babies. When it is anticipated that a baby may experience difficulties with feeding or maintaining their blood sugar levels after birth, expressing colostrum antenatally means that your baby will have a supply of breast milk available if required, therefore reducing the need to use infant formula. One of the ways of reducing the impact of this delay on your breastfeeding is to begin expressing and storing, during your pregnancy, from 36 weeks. This is a safe way to stimulate your milk supply and enable your milk to 'come in' within the average time frame. This milk (colostrum) you have expressed can be given to your baby if needed. It is normal for some women to produce colostrum only after they have given birth to their baby. Talk to your midwife and be reassured that this has no bearing on your ability to produce milk once you have had your baby.

Reasons this may be required include babies:

- whose mother experienced diabetes in pregnancy
- with a cleft lip and/or palate identified during pregnancy
- with congenital conditions such as Down syndrome or cardiac complications
- diagnosed with intrauterine growth restriction
- who are born prematurely.

### What is colostrum and why is it important?

- Colostrum is a fluid which is produced by the breasts from about the twentieth week of pregnancy and during the first few days after the birth of your baby.
- The appearance of colostrum may vary from dark yellow to clear; it can also be quite thick and sticky.
- Colostrum is easily digested and the ideal first food for your baby.
- Colostrum provides perfect nutrition specifically for your newborn baby. It has a much higher proportion of proteins than mature milk; many of these are immunoglobulins which help boost your baby's immunity. There are also fat-soluble vitamins and some minerals as well as a relatively high salt content which assists in protecting your baby from dehydration in the early days.
- Colostrum is low in volume but high in energy and helps with the early passage of meconium (baby's first bowel motion) which in turn assists in preventing jaundice (yellow skin colour).

### Why should I consider antenatal expressing?



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- Human milk is the recommended food for all babies, but especially for babies with additional health requirements (see list above)
- Expressing and storing colostrum before birth, may decrease the risk of your baby requiring or being given infant formula after birth.
- Expressing can assist in the promotion of successful, exclusive breastfeeding for you and your baby.

In addition, early and frequent feeding of your baby from birth will help maintain your baby's normal body temperature and reduce energy expenditure while stimulating suckling and milk production. This will help to maintain your baby's blood glucose level. Effective breastfeeding and having a store of expressed colostrum will decrease the need for your baby to be fed intravenously or receive infant formula. The following are some guidelines for you to follow.

## Expressing Breastmilk during Pregnancy (after 36 weeks)

- Wash your hands.
- Ensure you are in a calm relaxed mood and private place
- Apply warmth to breast.
- Gently stroke the breast towards the nipple to stimulate the let-down reflex.
- Place your hand underneath the breast, with your finger one side of the areola and your thumb on the other. Ensure your fingers are not touching the areola though.
- Gently press the fingers and thumb pads (not fingertips) back towards the chest wall into the breast tissue, then press them together and hold for a few seconds.
- The fingers should be well back from the nipple and should not drag on your breast.
- Don't squeeze or pinch the nipple.
- Repeat the action in a rhythm similar to a baby's sucking.
- When the colostrum begins to flow easily start collecting it in the syringe or a small cup.
- When colostrum ceases to flow, rotate the position of the fingers and thumb around the areola and repeat the expressing action.
- Change to the other breast when flow slows down.
- Express both breasts once or twice a day for 3 – 5 mins.
- Colostrum will be either clear/bright yellow/rusty red.
- Store expressed breast milk (EBM) in a syringe in the fridge (see section storage below). The milk should be in the body of the fridge at the back not in the door.
- Label container with the time and date that you expressed.
- Colostrum can be collected at one or two sessions during the same day; ensure collection container is stored in the refrigerator between sessions.
- Breastmilk can be stored in the fridge for up to 48 hours.

- At the end of the collecting day the colostrum can be frozen.
- You can then add chilled EBM from the fridge to the stored frozen EBM.
- Bring the frozen EBM into hospital with you when you come to hospital for your baby's birth.
- Transport the EBM in an insulated, cold container. The EBM will be checked and signed into the freezer in the Special Care Nursery or the fridge in the postnatal ward.
- If you have abdominal cramping during expression stop and talk to your health care provider at the next visit. Should the cramping persist, contact Birth Suite or your midwife.
- You should seek the advice of your midwife or doctor prior to starting antenatal breast milk expression if you have:
  - Had threatened or actual premature labour this pregnancy or past pregnancies;
  - Current threatened premature labour and are receiving medication to help stop the labour;
  - A cervical suture in place;
  - Placenta Praevia or;
  - A Multiple pregnancy.

## Storage

- Frozen breastmilk may be stored for 2 weeks in freezer compartment inside refrigerator; or
- 3 months in freezer section of refrigerator with separate door; or
- 6-12 months in a deep freeze (-18C or lower).

## At Birth

- Ensure initial skin-to-skin contact with your baby remains undisturbed for at least 30 - 60 minutes.
- Allow baby to nuzzle and feed for as long as baby wants to.
- Offer both breasts at this feed.
- Do not restrict baby's access to the breast.
- If baby is not effectively breastfeeding then express and offer baby your EBM via a syringe or cup.
- If you find hand expressing is not effective/comfortable then use an electric breast pump to express your milk. Your midwife will help you with this.