

Prenatal Hand Expression of Colostrum

What is colostrum?

Colostrum is the earliest breastmilk your body produces, beginning around the 16th week of pregnancy until the first few days after baby's birth. It is thick, and sticky, and is usually yellow, clear or white in color. It is highly concentrated and contains protein, sugar, fats and antibodies which help to boost your baby's immune system. Colostrum is the ideal first food for your baby providing the nutrition all newborns need.

Why should I collect colostrum?

- Colostrum is beneficial to ALL babies. Families who have made an informed decision not to breastfeed, can still provide their baby with colostrum expressed during pregnancy.
- In the first few hours to days of life, some babies may need extra nutrition, for example, babies that experience low blood sugar or jaundice. By expressing colostrum before your baby is born and bringing it to the hospital with you, you will have the ideal food source ready for you baby, if needed.

When can I start expressing colostrum?

- It is recommended that you are at least 37 weeks pregnant before you start collecting your colostrum.

How do I express colostrum?

- Hand expression is the best way to express colostrum from your breasts while you are pregnant. You can hand express your colostrum 2-3 times a day for 5-10 minutes each time.
- This video will show you how to hand express:
<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/pregnancy-parenting/parenting-babies-0-12-months/breastfeeding/video-hand-expressing-breastmilk>

Getting started:

- Any container/item that will be used to collect colostrum, must be thoroughly cleaned with hot water/dish detergent before you start and with every usage.
- Wash your hands well and have a clean container, syringe, cup or spoon to collect the colostrum
- *Optional:* Heat from placing warm compresses on your breasts or expressing after a bath or shower, may help the colostrum flow more easily.
- Sit in a comfortable, upright position, leaning slightly forward.
- Gently massage your breasts.
- Place your thumb and index finger in a C-shape outside the dark area of your nipple (areola) or about 1 to 1 ½ inches behind the nipple.
- Push your thumb and index finger back towards your chest and gently squeeze, then release the pressure. Do not pull or squeeze your nipple
- Repeat (press back, compress, relax)
- The amount of colostrum you get may vary from a drop to a teaspoon. There is no evidence that suggests that a woman who is only able to express a tiny amount of colostrum (or none at all) during pregnancy is at risk of having a low milk supply after baby is born.

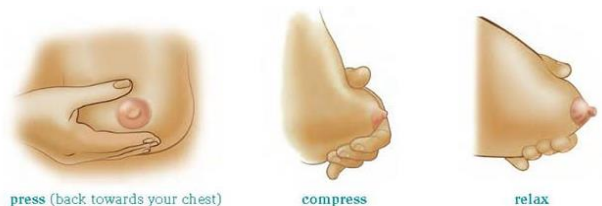


Image: Breastfeeding Matters (2017). Best Start Resources

When colostrum appears:

- Collect the drops in your clean container.
- When the colostrum stops flowing, rotate the position of your fingers and thumb around the areola to reach different areas of the breast.
- Repeat these steps (press back, compress, relax) on each breast for 5-10 minutes.

How do I store my colostrum?

- All expressed colostrum collected within 24 hours can be stored in the same container and placed in your refrigerator between expressing. Ensure container has a cover and is sealed tightly.
- At the end of each day:
 - Store the expressed colostrum in containers that hold small volumes, around 3-5mL (ex. 3mL syringes that can be purchased at your pharmacy).
 - Label each container/syringe with your name, date, and time(s) of collection
 - Place container/syringe(s) in a freezer bag and put in freezer.



Image: W. Pittman

Bringing your colostrum to the hospital:

- Make sure all containers/syringes are labelled.
- Place fresh/frozen colostrum into an insulated container/cooler bag with frozen gel/ice packs. This will prevent colostrum from thawing on the way to the hospital.
- Let the nurse taking care of you know that you have colostrum that needs to be placed in the freezer/refrigerator.

Your nurse will check the labels on your containers and ask these questions:

1. Did you use a clean container for collection?
2. How has your colostrum been stored?
3. If the colostrum is not frozen: Was it ever frozen? How long has it been thawed?

The nurse will then label the containers / syringes with hospital identification and store it appropriately, for later use.

For further information on Breastmilk Storage Guidelines see the Breastfeeding Handbook.

Reference: Baby friendly Breastfeeding Handbook NL Book (Page 34)

<https://babyfriendlynl.ca/app/uploads/2018/06/Breastfeeding-Handbook-2016-1-1.pdf>

***Talk to your healthcare provider to be sure that early colostrum expression is right for you**