

What is Colostrum?

- Colostrum is the first milk produced by your breasts from around 16 weeks of pregnancy and in the first few days after your baby is born.
- It is the ideal first food for your baby and has high levels of antibodies which help to protect your baby from infections.
- Colostrum is easily digested by your baby and helps with the passage of meconium (your baby's first bowel actions).

Why express colostrum during late pregnancy?

There are some situations which make it more likely that a breastfed baby might need extra milk in the first few days after birth. It is best that this extra milk is the mother's expressed colostrum.

However, sometimes in the first few days, it might be difficult to express enough colostrum so the baby may need some infant formula.

Expressing and storing colostrum before the birth of the baby may reduce the need to use infant formula after birth.

Another option is to use breastmilk from a family member or friend. This is known as donor breastmilk. This option must be discussed with a midwife, nurse or doctor first to make sure no possible infections are passed through to your baby.



Expressing colostrum before birth might be suggested in the following situations:

- Women with diabetes or thyroid disease, multiple sclerosis, other hormonal imbalances such as polycystic ovary syndrome.
- Women who have had breast surgery.
- Women with a history of low milk supply.
- Women with a strong family history of dairy intolerance or inflammatory bowel disease.
- Babies born by planned caesarean.
- Potential preterm baby.
- Babies with growth restriction, or potentially over 4kg.
- Babies with cleft lip and/or palate, Downs Syndrome, heart problems.

When can I start expressing?

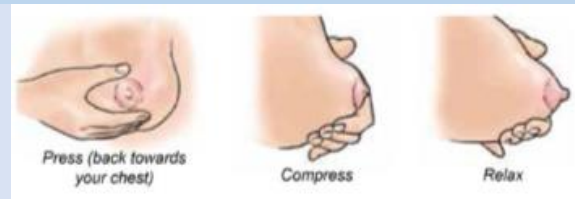
- Check with your midwife or doctor before you start at around 36 weeks or pregnancy
- Express each breast for 3-5 minutes, 2-3 times per day
- You may increase to a total of 5-10 minutes, 3 times per day. Hand express only, do not use a breast pump.
- **STOP** expressing if you experience painful contractions.

Do NOT express if.....

- You have a history of preterm labour,
- You are currently having problems with threatened preterm labour
- You have a stitch in your cervix or are taking medication to prevent preterm labour.
- You have placenta praevia (low-lying placenta).
- You are pregnant with twins or triplets - discuss this with your doctor or midwife first. You may still be able to express late in pregnancy.

Expressing and storing colostrum

- Wash and dry your hands. Remove the syringe from its packet - keep the packet to store the syringe in afterwards.
- Gently stroke your breast, nipple and areola (the dark area around your nipple) to help your colostrum to flow.
- Place your finger and thumb about 2-3 cm behind your nipple, on either side of your areola (dark area around your nipple).
- Press your finger and thumb pads back towards your chest wall then gently squeeze them together into your breast tissue for about 2 seconds, then release the pressure.
- Your fingers should be well back from your nipple. Don't squeeze or pinch your nipple. Repeat the action in a rhythmic way.
- When your colostrum drips easily start collecting it in the syringe.
- When colostrum stops dripping, rotate the position of your fingers and thumb around your areola and repeat the expressing action.
- Swap to your other breast when the colostrum stops dripping. Use both breasts at least twice each session.
- When finished expressing, put the syringe in the labelled package into the fridge.
- Colostrum can be collected 2-3 times on the same day and stored in the same syringe. Start a new syringe each day.
- At the end of the collecting day place the syringe into a zip lock bag and place into the freezer. Label the bag with your name and date of birth.
- Your frozen colostrum can be stored for 3 months in the freezer compartment of your fridge or 6-12 months in a deep freezer.
- Bring your frozen colostrum into hospital when you are having your baby and hand it to your midwife. It will be placed in the refrigerator/freezer in the postnatal ward or Special Care Nursery.
- If your baby needs extra milk after birth, let the midwife or nurse caring for you and your baby know that you have stored colostrum in the freezer.
- Colostrum also can be expressed into a clean medicine cup or spoon and then drawn up into a syringe for storage.



What if I can't express any colostrum?

Some women are unable to express any colostrum before the birth, because colostrum is quite thick and sticky. This does not affect milk supply after the baby is born.

What happens after my baby's birth?

- At every opportunity you should have skin to skin contact with your baby – immediately after birth and in the first few hours, before, during and after breastfeeding.
- Breastfeed your baby without any time restrictions from birth. If your baby needs extra milk you should express some colostrum and give it to your baby. If there isn't enough freshly expressed colostrum, you can then use some of your stored colostrum.
- If your baby has ongoing feeding or blood sugar control problems you should be guided by the advice of your paediatrician, midwife or nurse

Useful contacts

- Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) 24 hour helpline Ph. 1800686268
- Ballarat Health Service Breastfeeding Service Ph. 0439981937/ 53204977
- Parent Place Breastfeeding Support Cnr. Sturt and Albert Streets, Ballarat Central Ph. 0439981937/ 53206871
- 24 Hour Maternal and Child Health Advice Line Ph.132229.