

Collecting Colostrum While You're Pregnant

What is colostrum and why is it important?

- Colostrum is a fluid the breast makes from about the 20th week of pregnancy, up to the first few days after your baby is born.
- Colostrum is easy for your baby to digest—it's the ideal first food for your baby.
- It can range from dark yellow to clear, and can be quite thick and sticky.
- Colostrum gives the nutrition that all newborns need. It has a lot more protein than mature milk. Many of these proteins help make your baby's immune system stronger.
- Colostrum has fat-soluble vitamins, some minerals, and salt. All help to protect your baby from becoming dehydrated in the first few days, before breastfeeding is established.
- While the breast doesn't make large amounts, colostrum is high in energy and helps the meconium pass (the baby's first bowel movement), which then helps prevent jaundice.

Why should I think about expressing colostrum by hand?

- Breastmilk is the recommended food for all babies, especially for babies with more health needs.
- In some cases, babies need to be fed shortly after birth, for example, babies with low blood sugar. By expressing colostrum by hand (antenatal expression) and bringing it with you to the hospital, you'll have this ideal food source ready for your baby, if needed.
- Expressing can help promote successful breastfeeding for you and your baby.
- Mothers who collect colostrum while they're pregnant have more success establishing and maintaining breastfeeding.

When can I start expressing colostrum?

Doctors usually recommend you start once you're at least 37 weeks gestation.

How do I hand express colostrum?

Put warm compresses on your breasts or begin expressing after a bath or shower, as the heat may help the colostrum flow better. It may take a few days of practice before you start seeing a few drops of colostrum.

It's strongly recommended that you watch the Stanford Hand Expression video at:

<http://newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/HandExpression.html>

Before You Start

- Make sure the baby bottle you're using to collect the colostrum is clean.
 - Buy syringes from your pharmacy, as you'll use them to collect the colostrum as you express it.
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Getting Started

1. Wash your hands. Make sure the clean bottle is nearby.
2. Sit in a comfortable, upright position, leaning slightly forward.
3. Start with a gentle breast massage, stroking from the back of your breast towards the nipple.
4. Gently press your finger and thumb pads on the border of your areola (not your fingertips) back toward the chest wall and into the breast tissue, then press them together and hold for a few seconds (see Figure 1).

Your fingers should be well back from your nipple, on the border of your areola and shouldn't tug or drag on your nipple.

Don't squeeze or pinch your nipple.

5. Repeat, using a rhythm like that of a baby suckling at the breast.

Expressing should be comfortable; speak to your doctor if you have any discomfort or concerns, as you may need to see a lactation consultant.



Figure 1

When the Colostrum Starts Flowing

When you can see the colostrum (Figure 2), collect it with the clean baby bottle (Figure 3). There might only be a few drops from the nipple or it's dripping easily.

1. When the colostrum stops flowing, rotate the position of your fingers and thumb around the areola and repeat the expressing process.
2. Switch to the other breast when the flow slows down or after 2 to 3 minutes.
3. Express on each breast twice during a session.

You can collect the colostrum 2 to 3 times each day.



Figure 2



Figure 3

(Photo credits: Australian Breastfeeding Association)

When You're Done Collecting

1. When you're done, collect the colostrum using a clean syringe. Store the syringe(s) in the fridge.
2. Label the syringe and bag with a sticker with your name, the date, and the time you first expressed.
3. Put the freezer bag in the freezer. The frozen colostrum can be stored up to:
 - 4 months in a 2-door refrigerator or side-by-side refrigerator/freezer
 - 12 months in a deep freezer

Colostrum must be used within 24 hours once it's been thawed.

Bringing the Colostrum to the Hospital

Your colostrum stays frozen until your baby's born. At that time, the freezer bag with the syringes can be brought to the hospital.

1. Put the freezer bag in a cooler or in a bag full of ice before bringing to the hospital. Make sure the colostrum doesn't thaw before you get it to the hospital.
2. Make sure the label is still secure.
3. Tell your healthcare provider you brought in frozen colostrum, so it can be put in the breastmilk fridge.