



Patient Information Leaflet

# **Expressing Milk Antenatally**

**(A guide for mothers with babies  
at risk of low blood sugar at birth)**

**Produced by:**  
Maternity Department

**Date:** March 2018  
**Review due:** March 2021

**If you are unable to read this leaflet because English is not your first language, please ask someone who speaks English to telephone PALS on 01983 534850 for further information and help.**

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**Polish:**

Jeśli nie jesteś w stanie przeczytać tej ulotki bo angielski nie jest pierwszym językiem, poproś kogoś, kto mówi po angielsku, o kontakt telefoniczny z (PALS 01983 534850) aby uzyskać więcej informacji i pomoc

**Russian:**

Если вы не можете прочитать этот буклет на английском языке потому что не является первым языке, пожалуйста, попросите кого-нибудь, кто говорит на английском языке для телефонного (PALS 01983 534850) для получения дополнительной информации и помощи

**Turkish:**

Eğer İngilizce ana diliniz değilse, çünkü bu broşürü okumak için yapamıyorsanız, daha fazla bilgi için 01983 534850 üzerinde PALS telefon İngilizce bilen birine sormak ve yardım lütfen

**Bulgarian:**

Ако не сте в състояние да прочетете тази листовка, тъй като английският не е първи език, попитайте някой, който говори английски, за да телефонирам (PALS на 01983 534850) за повече информация и помощ

**Czech:**

Pokud nejste schopni přečíst tuto příbalovou informaci, protože angličtina není vaším rodným jazykem, zeptejte se někoho, kdo mluví anglicky na telefonní PALS na 01983 534850 pro další informace a pomoc

**Bengali:**

আপনি ইংরেজি আপনার প্রথম ভাষা না থাকার কারণে এই লফিলটে পড়তে অক্ষম হন, তাহলে আরও তথ্যের জন্য 01983 534850 নভেগিশেন PALS টলেফিে ন ইংরেজি কথা কটে জিজ্ঞাসা করুন এবং সাহায্য করুন

## Reasons to express antenatally

Hand expression is the best way to collect colostrum antenatally and in the first few days after birth. It is simple to learn and gets easier with practice.

Useful skill to learn for all women so you will always have a way to express milk if needed e.g. so you can Express a little on to the breast to tempt baby.

Can store the colostrum ready for if the baby needs it when its born especially if it is likely it will need special care immediately and avoid the use of formula.

Easier to express colostrum once the baby is born if it has feeding difficulties or needs to be cared for in special care unit.

Easier to express colostrum once the baby is born and provide milk to prevent or treat conditions like jaundice and low blood sugars.

You will learn to recognise changes in your breast and being able to express will help avoid/treat problems like engorgement and mastitis.

It could be particularly useful if you knew before the birth that your baby was at risk of having a low blood sugar in the first few hours after birth, this could be because;

- **You have Diabetes**

Research has shown that babies who are breast fed are less likely to develop childhood diabetes. It is thought that cow's milk (which is the main ingredient of formula milk) can trigger diabetes in some babies; this is probably more likely to happen if you (or your partner) have diabetes. Therefore it is very important that mothers who are diabetic avoid giving their baby formula milk at all, if possible, for at least 6 months.

If you have diabetes and are insulin dependent you may find your insulin requirements are lower when you are breastfeeding and that you need to eat more. If you have gestational diabetes research shows if you breastfed successfully you are less likely to develop diabetes later in life.

The baby of a diabetic mother is at risk of low blood sugars. Baby will need frequent feeds to help prevent this. Having colostrum available to give to the baby if it is reluctant to feed or needs extra feeds to correct low blood sugars will help to avoid the use of formula.

- **You have pre-eclampsia.**
- **You are taking beta blockers (medication) to control blood pressure (e.g. Labetolol).**
- **Your baby is thought to be small compared to other babies at the same stage of pregnancy.**

It may also be useful to express antenatally if you experience conditions where establishing breastfeeding may be more difficult or there may be a delay to your milk “coming in”  
e.g.

- Planned caesarean or induced birth.
- Breast abnormalities or previous breast surgery.
- Obesity.

## **Please note**

Antenatal hand expression is unlikely to trigger labour (some women continue to breast feed a toddler whilst pregnant again and go on to have full term healthy babies).

You may find that, when you express, you can feel your womb going hard and then relaxing – these are called ‘Braxton Hicks contractions’ and is a normal reaction. Don’t worry about this unless they begin to feel like period type cramps or mild labour contractions. This is rare, but if it does happen you should stop expressing and rest. If they don’t stop and you think you might be in labour, contact the Maternity Unit on 534329 or 534392.

### **How to hand express antenatally – for photos see page 24 of the essential guide to breastfeeding in your pack.**

- You can begin to express between 36 and 37 weeks of pregnancy.
- Express 2–3 times a day.
- The amount expressed will vary from women to women. Colostrum is concentrated nutrition so just a few drops are invaluable. The amount you get will increase with practice.
- It helps to be warm and relaxed.
- Wash your hands.
- Start by massaging your breast using a firm circular motion with a flat hand. Make sure your fingers catch your nipple as you massage so that your nipple begins to stand out or roll the nipple between your fingers after you have massaged the breast. This stimulates the hormone oxytocin to work which will help the milk begin to flow.

- Using your finger and thumb in a “c” shape feel back from the nipple about 2–3 cm and cup the breast.
- In this position now press your fingers back towards your rib cage.
- Gently squeeze or compress your finger and thumb together.
- Hold for a second.
- Then release – avoid sliding your fingers over the skin.
- Repeat this rhythmically.
- Press – hold – release (like a baby breastfeeding).

### **Practice makes perfect!**

You may need to repeat these actions a few times to get the colostrum to flow and you may get from a few drops to a teaspoon.

If the milk doesn't flow, try moving your fingers slightly towards the nipple or further away until you find the spot that works best for you.

- Keep your hands in one position until the flow of the milk drops slows. Then move your hands around to a different position (Think about the clock face e.g. move from 6 o'clock to quarter to 3!) to ensure all the lobes of the breast are drained.
- Repeat on the other breast.
- Aim to use both breasts twice each session.
- Hand expression should not be painful or cause discomfort.

**If you wish to see hand expressing on line please visit**

[www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/](http://www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/)

## **How much breast milk will I get?**

This will vary from woman to woman. At first you may not get anything but it is important to continue regularly to encourage the right hormones. Some may only get a few drops to a teaspoon which can be collected in a purple syringe. This first breast milk is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby fight infections. This small amount is perfect for your baby.

Even if you don't get any colostrum this does not mean you will be unable to make enough milk for your baby when it is born.

## **Collecting your breast milk**

Collect the drips in a sterilised small cup and then draw up into the syringe provided by antenatal clinic or straight into the syringe if you prefer. If you plan to express again that day place the syringe at the back of the fridge. Fresh colostrum inhibits the growth of bacteria so it is safe to leave in the fridge. After your last expression of the day label and date the syringe and put in a clean freezer bag and then in the freezer.

## **Storing your breast milk**

Colostrum and breast milk can be stored in a fridge below 4°C for up to 5 days and a freezer for up to 6 months. If you don't know the temperature of your fridge, it is safer to only store it for 48 hours.

If you start expressing at 37 weeks it would be best to store any colostrum obtained in the freezer. However, if you are expecting to be induced or have a caesarean within the next day or so you can store it in the fridge.

**Don't forget to bring any colostrum you have with you when you come into hospital to have your baby. Transport it in a cool bag with an ice pack and ask the midwife to store it in the freezer or fridge depending on how much you have and if it has thawed as soon as you get to the hospital. If you have more than a few syringes stored in the freezer at home do not bring it all in at once. Best to ask a friend or your partner to bring enough in for the following day as once thawed we cannot re freeze it.**

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## You may use this to record when you have hand expressed

If you wish to see hand expressing on line please visit [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

Or look at page 24 of the essential guide to breastfeeding leaflet for

	1	2	3		1	2	3
M				M			
T				T			
W				W			
T				T			
F				F			
S				S			
S				S			

You may find that, when you express, you can feel your womb going into 'contractions' and is a normal reaction. Don't worry about this unless you have very strong contractions. This is rare, but if it does happen you should stop expressing, contact the Maternity Unit on 534329 or 534392.

g.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/Hand-expression/  
pictures and information.

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**If you have any queries or concerns about the content of this leaflet please call (01983) 524081 and ask to speak to the relevant department.**

If you require this leaflet in another language, large print or another format, please contact the PALS Team, telephone **01983 534850**, who will advise you.

Valuables should not be brought into the hospital. If patients have to bring in valuable items they should ask a nurse to store them safely and request a receipt for the items. You may not be able to have the valuable items returned if the time of discharge from hospital is out of hours.

We are sorry but the Trust cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to items not given for safe keeping.

You can get further information on all sorts of health issues online at: **www.nhs.uk**

For Health advice and out of hours GP service please call the NHS 111 service on: **111**

### **We Value Your Views On Our Service**

If you wish to comment on the care which you, your relative or friend has received, we will be pleased to hear from you. Please speak to the person in charge of the ward, clinic or service in the first instance or ask them to contact the PALS Team. If you wish to contact them directly, telephone on **01983 534850**.

Alternatively you may prefer to write to:

Chief Executive  
Isle Of Wight NHS Trust  
St Mary's Hospital  
Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 5TG

You can also share any concerns you have about our services with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on **03000 61 61 61** or at **enquiries@cqc.org.uk**

All NHS sites are no smoking areas.

If you would like help and advice to stop smoking please call: Freephone 0800 169 0 169 to talk to the NHS Smoking Helpline.