

Antenatal hand expression

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Did you know?

You can start to collect some of your milk (colostrum) from 37 weeks in pregnancy.

Why hand express in pregnancy?

Stored colostrum can be useful in the early days while your baby learns to breastfeed. Colostrum helps to stabilise baby's blood glucose and is high in antibodies.

Practising hand expression can help build confidence and skills for feeding your baby.

Top tip

Before expressing, it helps to stimulate the milk flow by gently massaging your breasts and rolling your nipples between finger and thumb.

How to collect colostrum?

- Use colostrum syringes Express 2-3 times in each 24 hours period
- Keep the colostrum syringe in the fridge in between each expression
- At the end of each day, label the syringe with your name and date of expression, then store the syringe in your freezer
- Use a new syringe each day

How to hand express

Cup your breast and place your thumb and finger about 2-3 cm from your nipple.



Using your thumb and the rest of your fingers in a C shape, gently but firmly compress and release in a rhythm – this should not hurt.



If colostrum does not appear after a few minutes, try moving your fingers towards your nipple or further away - find where works best for you.

Be careful not to 'slide' your fingers along as this can stop the milk flowing.

When the drips slow down, move your fingers around to express a different section of your breast and compress and release again.

When the drips slow again, move to your other breast and repeat.

If you do not see any colostrum, don't worry, this is common. Ask your midwife to check your hand expressing technique.

Top tip

Bring your frozen colostrum to hospital with you in a cool bag on an ice pack. Let the staff know immediately, so it can be stored in the freezer to prevent it from defrosting before it is needed!

Stimulating labour

If you are having your labour induced, then your midwife may suggest that you hand express and stimulate your nipples to help release hormones that help labour.

What if I get some tightenings?

Towards the end of your pregnancy, you may start to feel your bump going hard and then softening, this is your womb tightening and relaxing.

These are called Braxton Hicks contractions and are quite normal. This may also occur when you express and usually settles when you stop expressing.

If the contractions continue and become painful, follow the advice given by your midwife on what to do if you think your labour has started.

More information on feeding and caring for your baby, is available from your midwife and in the link here:

<https://www.canva.com/design/DAFQVjVS0gA/yCzRFR6pARSqFZMwio3-fQ/view#1>

For a short video on antenatal hand expression please see the video by clicking on this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmabPHNd9uQ>

References

May 2023 References: Some images and content from 'Off to the best start' (2015) leaflet by DOH and content from 'Building a Happy Baby' (2016) leaflet by Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative.

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