



York Teaching Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Maternity Services

① For more information, please contact:

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What is antenatal colostrum harvesting?

Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting involves hand expressing in the final weeks of pregnancy to build up a store of colostrum. This can be given to baby in the first few days after the birth and can avoid the need for artificial milk supplementation.

As well as reducing the likelihood of artificial milk supplementation, mums have the opportunity to practice the technique of hand expression at their own home without the pressure of a hungry baby. They can feel more confident in their ability to breastfeed and potentially have higher volumes of breast milk available for baby in the early days.

Who should do antenatal colostrum harvesting?

Most women can safely do colostrum harvesting and it is particularly recommended for women who have diabetes, raised blood pressure, have a multiple pregnancy or are expecting to give birth to a small baby. These babies need frequent feeds in the first few days to protect them from low blood sugar levels (hypoglycaemia).

Other women who might benefit from antenatal colostrum harvesting include those planning an elective caesarean section, have polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), a raised BMI, are expecting a baby with a cleft lip / palate or had a previous poor feeding experience.

Antenatal colostrum harvesting is not currently recommended for women who have had a cervical suture, a premature birth, premature rupture of membranes or vaginal bleeding.

When and how often should I do antenatal colostrum harvesting?

Colostrum harvesting can be started after 36-37 weeks of pregnancy. Your midwife or the Infant Feeding Co-ordinator will be able to provide information specific to your circumstances.

Initially express just once or twice a day for approximately 5 minutes each time and aim to gradually increase to three times per day for 10 minutes.

Painless tightenings might be felt (Braxton Hicks contractions) but if any uncomfortable cramping or painful contractions are experienced, then it is important that you stop expressing and rest.

How do I express and store the colostrum?

Your midwife, the antenatal clinic or the Infant Feeding Co-ordinator (IFC) will provide you with an antenatal colostrum harvesting pack which contains small syringes and labels.

The midwife or IFC can demonstrate the technique of hand expressing on a knitted breast model. Also please refer to the description of the technique on page 5 of this booklet. Never use a breast pump whilst pregnant.

A new syringe should be used at the start of each day, reused throughout the day (unless full) and stored in the fridge between times. At night the syringe should be labelled and frozen.

An exception to the above is when very small amounts of colostrum (or none at all) is seen in the first few days. In this circumstance, the same syringe can be used for a maximum of three consecutive days.

When you come into hospital to have your baby, bring the frozen colostrum with you in a bag between ice blocks. The staff will put it in the freezer compartment on ward G2 (York site) or in the freezer on SCBU (Scarborough site).

The colostrum needs to stay frozen as once it is defrosted it needs using within 24 hours.

When would the stored colostrum be used?

The stored colostrum can be defrosted and used if your baby cannot feed directly from the breast and/or requires more colostrum beyond that which you are able to express at that moment in time.

It is still important that your baby has every opportunity to learn to feed directly from the breast and stored colostrum should not be considered a substitute for this.

How to hand express

- 1) Before starting, it is important to get yourself as comfortable as possible and try to relax your mind. It helps to have baby close by or, if that is not possible, to visualise baby or look at something that reminds you of baby.
- 2) With clean hands, lightly massage the breasts for approximately five minutes. This is to trigger the hormone release, not to squeeze the milk out at this stage. Keep the touch light, comfortable and pleasurable. You can stroke the breast from the outside towards the nipple area, or do light brushes from the nipple outwards. Alternatively lightly knead the breast towards the nipple or do circular motions. Follow this by a minute of touching the nipple to help the flow of hormones.
- 3) Following massage, place your thumb and index finger in a C shape on either side of the nipple. The optimal place varies from woman to woman but generally it is about two to three centimetres away from the base of the nipple and a change in breast texture might be felt in this spot.

- 4) Rhythmically compress and release the glandular tissue beneath your fingers. Do not slide your fingers across the skin and do not cause yourself pain. You might quickly see a bead of milk develop at the end of your nipple or it might take a while. If after a couple of minutes no drops are visible, try moving your fingers either further away or closer to the nipple.
- 5) Beads of milk can be collected with the purple syringes provided. When no further beads of milk are visible, rotate your fingers around your breast to express from the other parts and also switch breasts.

Several videos are available online that demonstrate how to hand express such as that available on the UNICEF UK website at www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/

[Accessed October 2020]

Please be aware that these videos usually contain women with a very well established milk supply and does not represent the small amounts that it is possible to express in the first few days following the birth.

Where can I get more information or syringes?

Regular 'drop in' sessions are held by the Infant Feeding Co-ordinator (IFC) and it is possible to speak to her by phone on 07766 498290 or to arrange an appointment. Either the IFC or antenatal clinic will be able to give you more syringes.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Julie Stones, Infant Feeding Coordinator, The York Hospital, York, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 721917 or email Julie.stones@york.nhs.uk

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio.

如果你要求本資 不同的 或 式提供 , 電
或發電

Jeżeli niniejsze informacje potrzebne są w innym języku lub formacie, należy zadzwonić lub wysłać wiadomość e-mail

Bu bilgileri değişik bir lisanda ya da formatta istiyorsanız lütfen telefon ediniz ya da e-posta gönderiniz

Telephone: 01904 725566

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