

Information Sheet

Expressing Colostrum Antenatally (before birth)

If more information is required please don't hesitate to ask your Midwife, Doctor or Maternal & Child Health Nurse

This information sheet has been designed to provide you with information about the value of expressing colostrum antenatally (before baby arrives) and how to store and use it after collection.

Some babies may need supplementary or formula feeds after birth for a range of reasons including:

- Diabetes in pregnancy
- Infants diagnosed with cleft lip or palate antenatally
- Infants with Intrauterine Growth Restriction (IUGR).
- Women who have had breast surgery.
- Women with a history of low milk supply
- Women with Polycystic Ovary Disease
- Established premature labour where birth is expected to proceed.
- Congenital conditions which may indicate early feeding problems such as Downs Syndrome or cardiac issues.

Expressing milk/colostrum antenatally (before your baby is born) can help to prepare for this situation if it arises.

Why should I express antenatally?

- Expressing and storing colostrum before the birth of your baby may reduce the likelihood of your baby being given infant formula after birth.
- It can promote successful, exclusive breast feeding from birth.

What is Colostrum & why is it important?

- Colostrum is a fluid which is produced by the breast from about the twentieth week of pregnancy and during the first few days after the birth of your baby.

- Colostrum is easily digested and; therefore, the ideal first food for your baby
- Its appearance may vary from dark yellow to clear and can be quite thick and sticky.
- Colostrum provides perfect nutrition specifically for your newborn baby. It has a much higher proportion of proteins that help boost your baby's immunity than mature milk
- It assists in protecting your baby from dehydration in the early days as it contains fat-soluble vitamins, some minerals and a relatively high salt content
- Colostrum is low in volume but high in energy and helps with the early passage of meconium (the baby's first bowel motion) which in turn assists in preventing jaundice (yellow skin colour).

How to express Colostrum...

- You will need 1ml and 3ml syringes (available from a pharmacy or your midwife) and plastic zip lock bags to store your syringes in the freezer
- It's best to express after your shower when your breasts are warm and your hands are clean. Otherwise wash your hands and warm your breasts with a heat pack before expressing
- Gently massage your breasts towards the nipple to stimulate the 'let down' reflex.
- Compress your breasts with thumb and fingers above and below the areola (the dark skin around the nipple), pressing back towards the chest wall, not squeezing towards the nipple. Try to mimic the rhythm of a baby sucking –the action is 'press, compress, and release'. As the flow slows, move your fingers around to express different ducts
- Express for about 3 to 5 minutes each side – as flow stops on one side, swap to the other breast, repeat so each breast is expressed twice in a session
- As colostrum drops appear, collect these in a syringe. If you have a good flow, you can express into a clean medicine glass or spoon

Information Sheet

Expressing Colostrum Antenatally (before birth)

(wash in hot soapy water, rinse and dry) and draw the colostrum up into a syringe

- Colostrum can be collected two to three times each day in the same syringe. You will need to store the syringe in the fridge between uses.

What happens after the birth of my baby?

- When possible, you should have uninterrupted skin to skin contact with your baby for 1-2 hours after birth
- Breastfeeding is encouraged and unrestricted
- If your baby has feeding difficulties or requires extra milk you may express some colostrum and give it to your baby and/or use some that you have brought in to hospital.

When can I start to express?

- You should discuss with your midwife or doctor.
- You may start expressing at 37 weeks gestation.
- Start with 3-5 minutes on each breast 2-3 times a day.
- STOP expressing if you are having contractions at the same time.

Do not express if...

- You have a history or are currently having problems with threatened or actual premature labour.
- You have cervical incompetence
- You have a suture in your cervix to help prevent preterm labour.

We welcome feedback at:

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service PO Box 474 Bairnsdale VIC 3875

P (03) 5150 3241 **F** (03) 5152 6784 **E** complaintsandcompliments@brhs.com.au www.brhs.com.au

The information in this brochure is intended as a guide to one of the services provided by BRHS and is correct at the time of publishing This brochure was based on information from King Edward Memorial Hospital "Formula Feeding" (2014).

Issue date: November 2024 **Our Ref:** MS0004

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunaikurnai people.

Things to remember...

- Expressing should not be painful, please contact the maternity unit if you are experiencing pain whilst expressing or need any other support
- At the end of the collecting day (24hr period), the colostrum can be frozen—place the syringe into a zip-lock bag before putting into the freezer
- Label the syringe and bag (separately) with a sticker detailing the date and time of the first expression collected
- The frozen colostrum can be stored for three months in the freezer or six to 12 months in the deep freezer
- Your colostrum will remain frozen until the time comes for your baby's birth at which time the containers can be brought to hospital labelled with the mothers' name, hospital record number, date and time the colostrum was expressed
- Transport your milk in a cooler bag with freezer brick enclosed.

If you have any questions, please contact the Maternity Ward on 03 5150 3455.

References: Ramsay Health Care; Pindara Private Hospital, *Antenatal Expression of Colostrum* (2011).

Mater Mothers Hospital; *Antenatal Expression of Colostrum* (2018)

<http://brochures.mater.org.au/Home/Brochures/Mater-Mothers-Hospital/Breastfeeding-antenatal-expression-of-colostrum>

<http://www.pinkymckay.com/expressing-colostrum-during-pregnancy-your-newborns-first-immune-boost/>