Patient Information Service

Women and children’s business unit

Antenatal expressing and storage of your colostrum

Southend University Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust
Introduction

Breastfeeding and diabetes

It is well known that exclusive breastfeeding (that means your baby has your breastmilk and nothing else to eat or drink) for around the first six months has many health benefits.

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

If you are a mother with diabetes, during the first few hours after birth, your baby may have a short time when his/her blood glucose level is low and therefore will need a little extra milk. To help prevent this you will be encouraged to give your baby frequent feeds. It is also very helpful if you have already expressed some of your breastmilk (the first breastmilk is called colostrum) so that it can be given to your baby should she/he need extra milk, and therefore possibly avoiding the need to give formula milk.

If you have diabetes and are insulin dependent you may find that your insulin requirements are lower when you are breastfeeding and that you need to eat more. If you have gestational diabetes research has shown that you are less likely to go on to develop diabetes in later life if you breastfeed your baby.
When and how often can I express?

You can start to express between 36-37 weeks into your pregnancy.

Start by expressing for no more than three to five minutes at each session.

The total time expressing once proficient should only be five to ten minutes at each session; and be done more than once a day.

Painless Braxton Hicks contractions are acceptable whilst hand expressing. It is advisable to stop expressing if the uterine contractions become regular and painful.

Why hand express?

You will only be expressing small amounts of colostrum which can be collected more easily by hand expressing than using a pump where drops of colostrum can be lost around the funnel of the pump.

How to express your colostrum

Hand expressing milk simply means gently compressing your breasts to gain colostrum and this is how you do it:

- Start by getting comfortable ensuring you are as relaxed as possible. Whilst you are relaxing, it may help to take time out to talk/sing to baby and notice the baby’s movements; research has shown that this has a positive impact on the emotional well-being of you and your baby.
• It can be helpful to have a shower or bath before expressing; alternatively you can use a warm cloth or warm hands and gentle massage prior to expressing as a way of stimulating hormones to encourage the flow of colostrum

**Locating the ‘right spot’ or area most effective for hand expressing should be demonstrated to you by your specialist, prior to receiving this leaflet**

• Cup your breast with your hand in a ‘C’ shape with four fingers under the breast and the thumb at the top. ‘Walk’ down the breast with your fingers until you feel a different texture, this will be about two to three centimetres back from the base of your nipple

• Using your thumb and index finger, gently squeeze this area (this shouldn’t hurt.), releasing the pressure and then repeating the action again, building up a rhythm. Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin which may hurt and could damage your skin, milk should start to appear. Because the first milk (colostrum) is very concentrated, it is thick, and will come out of your breast drop by drop. Every drop of colostrum is precious

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

• When the flow slows down, move your fingers around the breast, so that your thumb and index fingers are opposite each other and begin again. If it is comfortable, you can express from all around this area of the breast

• Express from the other breast following the steps above.
Collection and storage of your colostrum

Your specialist will provide you with syringes, bungs and labels for your colostrum.

- Any colostrum gained can be collected in the syringes, sealed with the bungs and labelled with your name, date and time of expression

- The same syringe can be used for two to three expressions on the same day ensuring that it is stored in the back of the fridge (maximum temperature of 4°C) between expressions

- At the end of the day the syringe/s of colostrum can be placed in a sandwich bag and then in a freezer (minimum temperature of -18°C); this could be stored for up to three months

- When you are admitted to hospital for the birth of your baby, you can bring your frozen colostrum into hospital. The colostrum should be handed to staff as soon as you are admitted so that it can be stored in the Neonatal unit freezer if it is unlikely to be used within 24 hours of being defrosted

If you are likely to deliver in less than 24 hours, ie an elective caesarean delivery, some or all of the colostrum can be stored in the milk kitchen fridge on MB2 (maternity postnatal ward)

- Defrosted colostrum should be used within 24 hours; otherwise it needs to be discarded
• The colostrum should always be labelled using the labels you have been provided with. If any colostrum is removed from the freezer, the date and time it was removed from the freezer should be added to the label.

• Ensure that the midwife caring for you is aware that you have collected your milk antenatally should it be needed by your baby. When/if baby requires the colostrum; it should be administered by the staff caring for you and your baby.

• Because of the enormous benefits of colostrum, it can only be a benefit if baby receives this before it would need discarding.

Note

You may find that when you hand express you feel your womb (uterus) going hard and relaxing – this is called ‘Braxton Hicks’ contractions. Don’t worry about these, unless they begin to feel like period type cramps or mild labour contractions; this is rare, but if it happens, you should stop expressing and rest.

If the contractions don’t stop and you think you might be in labour, you should telephone the delivery suite on 01702 385163.
How much colostrum will I get?

This will vary from woman to woman, anything from a few drops to a teaspoon is normal. You will only be expressing small amounts of colostrum which is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby to fight infections; this small amount is perfect for your new baby.

Don’t forget to bring any colostrum you have expressed with you when you come into hospital to have your baby. Depending on how much you managed to collect you may only want to bring a small amount to begin with, your partner/family could bring more once the baby has been delivered.
If this leaflet does not answer all of your questions, or if you have any other concerns please contact the maternity department – Infant feeding advisor on 01702 435555 ext 7296 Diabetes specialist midwife on 01702 435555 ext 8337.

www.southend.nhs.uk

For a translated, large print or audio tape version of this document please contact:

Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)
Southend University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Prittlewell Chase
Westcliff-on-Sea
Essex, SS0 0RY

Telephone: 01702 385333
Fax: 01702 508530
Email: pals@southend.nhs.uk