



# Antenatal hand expressing

Colostrum is produced by the breast during the later stages of your pregnancy and the first few days after the birth. It provides all the fluid and nutrition that a healthy newborn needs.

## Why should I consider antenatal hand expressing?

It helps develop familiarity with your breasts and how they work, as well as confidence with the technique of hand expressing.

Expressing and storing colostrum before birth may reduce the risk of your baby being given formula after birth.

## When should I start antenatal hand expressing?

You may start antenatal hand expressing after 36 completed weeks of pregnancy.

Before starting, have a discussion with your midwife, lactation consultant or healthcare provider about your pregnancy.

Do not express antenatally if:

- You have been advised against expressing
- You have a history of threatened or preterm labour
- You have cervical incompetence or have had a suture placed in your cervix to prevent preterm labour
- You have had any bleeding in the pregnancy
- You have a placenta praevia or accreta.

## How often do I express?

Express for 3 to 5 minutes on each breast twice a day; for example, once in the morning and once in the evening.

The colostrum can be collected in the same clean container and stored in the fridge between expressions. The container is frozen at the end of the collecting day.

**Cease hand expressing immediately if you are experiencing tightening or having contractions.**

## How do I hand express?

- Wash your hands with soap and water and dry on a clean towel.
- Use a clean container, medicine cup or syringe.
- Gently stroke the breast towards the nipple. This stimulates the letdown reflex.
- Place the fingers underneath the breast, so the first finger is just below and the thumb is just above the areola, about 3 to 4cm back from the nipple.
- Gently **press** the fingers and thumb pads (not fingertips) back towards the chest.
- Then **compress** the breast tissue and hold briefly.
- **Release** the breast tissue.
- Do not squeeze or pinch your nipple.
- Rotate the position of the fingers and thumb around the breast to express all of the breast.
- When you notice a droplet, it is time to collect the colostrum.
- Express both breasts.
- Label the container with your name, date and time of expression.



## How much milk will I express?

There is a wide variation in the amount of colostrum that can be expressed antenatally. Some women are unable to express any colostrum at all; this is normal.

There is no evidence to suggest that if you express a small amount or no colostrum antenatally that you are at risk of low breast milk supply.

## Storing your colostrum

Your colostrum should be frozen until your baby's birth.

Bring the labelled frozen colostrum to hospital in an insulated bag with a freezer block. Inform the midwife caring for you that you have frozen colostrum. This will be stored in a dedicated freezer until your baby is born.

## What happens after the birth of my baby?

Skin to skin contact and a breastfeed immediately after your baby's birth will help initiate breastfeeding. Frequent stimulation and removal of milk from the breast (8 to 12 times in 24 hours) is then required to establish supply.

If your baby is having difficulties breastfeeding you can offer any available colostrum.

However, it is important to continue offering the breast and expressing to support your breastmilk supply.

Thawed breastmilk must be used within 24 hours.

Hand expressing following the birth of your baby can be helpful to soften a full breast, making it easier for your baby to latch and feed effectively.

## Support and follow-up

For individual lactation support, contact the Breastfeeding Centre of WA on (08) 6458 1844, Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm, or visit the website.

For more information, contact the Australian Breastfeeding Association Breastfeeding Helpline on 1800 686 268 or visit the website [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au)



Scan the QR code for resources on breastfeeding



The information provided is for information purposes only. If you are a patient using this publication, you should seek assistance from a healthcare professional when interpreting these materials and applying them to your individual circumstances.



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