The Rosie

Antenatal hand expression of breast milk guidance

A midwife or Maternity Support worker (MSW) has suggested to you that expressing your breast-milk in pregnancy may be helpful. This can be done safely from 36 weeks of pregnancy as long as you have no risk of bleeding in pregnancy, are not at risk of pre-term birth or are expecting twins.

Why might it be useful to express breast milk while pregnant?

- If you know how to hand express your milk in pregnancy, you can use this skill after birth, should you need it.
- You may be able to express a small amount of colostrum (early milk), which you could give to your baby if they need encouragement to feed after they are born.
- You will always have a way to express your milk if it is needed. This will lower the chance of your baby requiring any formula milk.
- If you are finding breastfeeding challenging at the beginning, you can give your milk to baby through a syringe or cup so that he is only getting your milk from the very start. By giving your baby colostrum you can know you’re giving your baby the best start in life. Every feed matters and the longer you continue to give breast milk, the greater the benefits for baby and you.
- You will be able to provide your own milk for your baby to prevent or treat conditions such as low blood sugar or jaundice. This lowers the chance of your baby requiring formula milk.
- By hand expressing you will be able to express colostrum for your baby if he is being cared for in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).
- You will be able to identify changes in your breasts. This will help you to recognise any symptoms of mastitis or engourgement so that it can be avoided or treated quickly.
- If you are coming to us for an induction of labour, hand expressing can help to induce labour. Nipple stimulation mimics the suckling of baby which releases the hormone called oxytocin. Oxytocin causes your uterus (womb) to contract, so hand expressing may help your labour along.

Do you know….?

Breastmilk can be stored in the fridge for up to 48 hours and can be stored in the freezer for up to 6 months. This means that your milk can be stored and used when your baby is born. The midwife will give you all the equipment you need to collect your milk.
How do I hand express?
A midwife or MSW will show you the technique, using a knitted breast.
There is also advice in your “Mothers and Others Guide” magazine.
These links are also helpful:
- [https://www.laleche.org.uk/antenatal-expression-of-colostrum/](https://www.laleche.org.uk/antenatal-expression-of-colostrum/)
- [www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/handexpression](www.unicef.org.uk/BabyFriendly/Resources/AudioVideo/handexpression)

Why hand express rather than use a pump?
- You will only be expressing small amounts of colostrum, so using the pump at this stage will be impractical and may not be as effective.
- Antenatally, you will only need to express until you have a few drops of colostrum expressed. By expressing up to three times a day, you can express enough for baby’s first feeds as babies require no more than a teaspoon of colostrum. This is because it is extra- concentrated milk that is rich in fat.

If you have any other questions please don’t hesitate to contact the midwife looking after you.

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