

# Hand expressing breast milk during your pregnancy

Antenatal Hand Expressing - a leaflet to inform mothers who would like to do antenatal hand expression of breast milk, from 36 weeks of pregnancy.

At the Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals Trust, we are working towards the Baby Friendly Initiative Global award. An important part of this work involves showing mothers the skill of hand expressing breast milk.

Antenatal hand expression is not new and dates back to medieval times. Over the last few years more and more trusts have been revisiting this age old skill to support infant feeding.

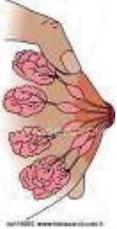
## Why is hand expressing breast milk in pregnancy helpful?

- It may increase your awareness of how your breasts work.
- It may increase your confidence in your ability to produce milk and breastfeed.
- Colostrum harvesting (where this is possible) enables you to give colostrum to your baby in preference to manufactured milks, when there are early challenges.
- Harvested colostrum enables the prevention or treatment of hypoglycaemic (low blood sugar) episodes in at risk babies (breast milk achieves and maintains blood sugars, more efficiently than manufactured milks).
- Supports exclusive breastfeeding.
- Avoids or reduces risk associated with manufactured milks.
- Colostrum is rich in nutrients and antibodies that help to protect your baby from infection.

## How to hand express your breast milk

- Applying some warmth to the breast before expressing may help (hot flannels or a shower).
- Wash hands before starting.
- Collect with 1-2 ml oral syringes or when expressing larger quantities, a clean and sterilised container can be used. Syringes and stoppers can be obtained from your community midwife.
- Take your time, relax and think about your lovely bump and how pleased your baby will be to meet and be cuddled by you.
- Cup the breast using your thumb and index finger in a 'C' shape, about 2.5 cms away from the base of the nipple.

- Compress your finger and thumb together, this should not hurt.
- Relax and repeat the action, developing a rhythm.
- Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin, dragging the skin, or pinching the nipple.
- You may not see any colostrum, you may see a few drops; some women will produce a lot.
- Volumes seem to increase with repeated expressions.
- After a few minutes or after the flow of milk has stopped, rotate finger and thumb around and express again (thinking of the numbers on a clock and expressing on all the numbers can be helpful).
- Move to the other breast when rotation fails to bring a new flow of milk.
- Just one hand expression a day is sufficient to practice the technique, but you can do more.



**Some women will build up to 10 minutes four times a day.**

### Things to be aware of

You may experience mild tightenings (your uterus going hard and then relaxing when you express). This is called Braxton Hicks and is nothing to worry about.

If it starts to feel like period pains or a mild contraction then stop hand expressing. This is very unusual but if you think that you could be in early labour then ring the labour ward.

### How to store your expressed milk

Your syringes can be stored in plastic food bags that have been labelled with your name, your date of birth, and the date and time of collection. If you have collected the milk in a larger sterile container, transfer the milk to a sterile bottle or freezer bag for breast milk, and label as above.

Store the milk in the fridge at 2-4°C for up to six days, in the fridge freezer for up to two weeks or in the freezer for up to three months. The back of the bottom shelf is the coldest place in your fridge, fridge thermometers can be obtained from a hardware shop at small expense.

## If you are having your baby in hospital

Bring your breast milk with you in a cool bag. Make sure that all bottles /bags of expressed milk have been labelled with your name, your date of birth and the date and time the milk was collected. Give it to a member of staff as soon as you arrive and they will put it in the fridge/freezer for you.

### Further information

If you have any more questions about antenatal hand expressing, please speak to your community midwife or phone the hospital on 01444 441881 (PRH) or 01273 696955 (RSCH) and ask for the maternity day assessment unit.

For more useful information and to learn more about our services, please see our web site My Pregnancy Matters

### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

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- Expressing milk before birth: A tool for use in special circumstances. Breastfeeding USA. 2014.
- Effect of antenatal expression of breast milk at term to improve lactational performance: a prospective study. The Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of India, vol. 59.No 4: July/August 2009.
- How to teach a mother the technique of hand expressing. Midwives magazine: Issue 5: 2011.

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