



A Guide for
Parents-to-be

Antenatal Hand Expressing (AHE):

What Is Colostrum?

Colostrum is the first milk your body makes for your baby.

It is thick, sticky and usually yellow, clear or orange.

Every drop is rich in nutrients and immune-protective cells.

Even if you don't plan to breastfeed, collecting colostrum before birth can give your baby an excellent start.

Why Express Colostrum During Pregnancy?

Learning to hand express before birth can:

- help you feel confident with breastfeeding
- support early feeding after birth
- provide a store of colostrum if your baby needs extra feeds
- help you navigate feeding challenges if they arise

Benefits of Colostrum

- Helps stabilise your baby's blood sugar
- Protects against infection
- Easy to digest
- Helps clear meconium (first poo)
- Can reduce jaundice

Who Might Benefit Most From AHE?

Antenatal hand expressing can help everyone, and is particularly beneficial if:

- you have diabetes (gestational or pre-existing)
- your BMI is over 30
- you have high blood pressure
- you have a thyroid condition
- you're having a planned caesarean section
- your labour is being induced
- you are having more than one baby

You can start from 36 weeks

You will require 1ml colostrum collector syringes (blunt-ended, no needle) so you are prepared to start from 36 weeks gestation.

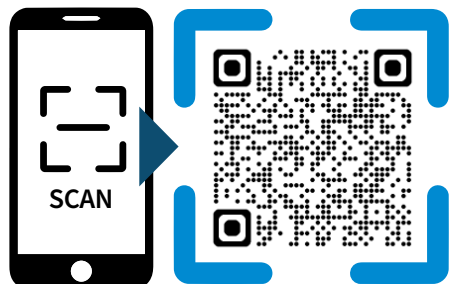
Frequency:

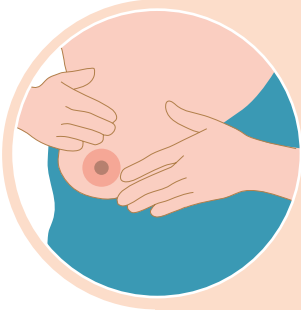
Start once or twice a day, then gradually increase to around 3-4 short sessions per day. Aim to express from both breasts at least twice each session. You only need to express for 5-10 minutes per breast.

Only express by hand. Do not use a breast pump before birth.

If nothing appears, don't worry and try again later.

Scan this QR code for a [Hand expression video - Baby Friendly Initiative](#)





- Wash your hands and have a clean/sterile container or syringe ready.
- Make sure you feel comfortable and relaxed before beginning.
- Warm up the breast: massage gently over the whole breast, nipple and underarm for a few minutes.
- Form a "C" shape:



- Place your thumb above and fingers below the nipple, well back from the areola.
- Gently press your fingers and thumb back towards your chest wall.
- Compress them together rhythmically, then release.
- Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin.



- When drops appear, collect them with the syringe.
- When the flow slows, move your hand position to drain another area.
- Swap to the other breast and repeat.



Troubleshooting

If no colostrum appears:

- Move your fingers slightly closer to or further from the nipple
- Try pressing back towards the chest wall before compressing
- Add a gentle "thumb roll" downwards
- Pause, relax, and try again later

Any amount you collect is valuable.

Storing and Transporting Your Colostrum

Using the same syringe:

- You can add to the same syringe across one day.
- At the end of the day (or when full), label with:
 - > your name
 - > date
 - > time collected

Storage guidelines

- Refrigerator (back of fridge): up to 5 days
- Freezer box inside fridge: up to 2 weeks
- Deep freezer: up to 6 months

Defrosting

- Defrost in the fridge or hold the syringe in a warm hand.
- Once thawed, colostrum must be used immediately.

Bringing colostrum to hospital

- Put all syringes/containers in a sealed, clear bag labelled with:
 - > your name
 - > address
 - > date of birth
- Transport frozen syringes in an insulated bag with an ice pack.
- Tell the maternity team as soon as you arrive so it can be placed in the freezer.



Support and Contacts



Antenatal Clinic
01224 552743



Infant Feeding Team
01224 551973



Peer Support Team
gram.breastfeedingsupport@nhs.scot



National Breastfeeding Helpline
0300 100 0212 (24/7)