

Patient and Carer Information

EXPRESSING YOUR MILK IN PREGNANCY

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is written for mothers with diabetes although other mothers may find it useful. It provides information about expressing breastmilk antenatally (before birth). It explains the benefits of expressing, how to do it, and aims to answer some common questions.

What are the benefits?

Research shows that babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop childhood diabetes. It is thought that cow's milk (which is the main ingredient of formula milk) can trigger diabetes in some babies. This is more likely for your baby if you or your partner have diabetes. We therefore encourage parents who are diabetic to avoid giving their baby formula milk if possible until the baby is at least 6 months old.

Why is expressing so important for diabetic mothers?

In the first few hours of life, your baby may have a low blood sugar. Receiving colostrum (the first breastmilk) at this time can help stabilise your baby's blood sugar. You will therefore be encouraged to give your baby frequent feeds and if you have already expressed some colostrum this may be used.

What if I have Type 1 diabetes?

If you have Type 1 diabetes, 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.

How often can I express?

We recommend you express up to 2 to 3 times a day.

When can I start?

You can start from 36-37 weeks of pregnancy.

How much milk will I get?

This will vary from mother to mother, from a few drops to a teaspoonful. This first breastmilk (called colostrum) may be yellow/orange or clear in colour and is thick and sticky. It is produced from about 16 weeks of pregnancy. It is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby to fight infections. This small amount is perfect for your new baby.

Can mothers-to-be who are not diabetic express milk antenatally?

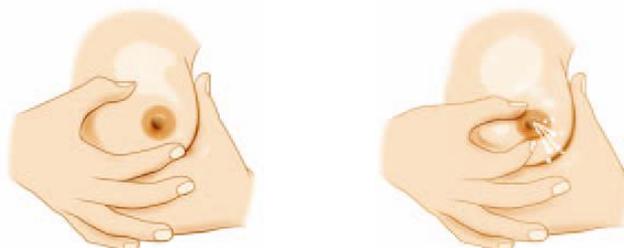
Yes. Any mother-to-be can express her breast milk in pregnancy. It is particularly useful if you know that your baby is at an increased risk of having a low blood sugar in the first few hours after birth. These include mothers who:

- are taking beta-blockers to control their blood pressure (e.g. labetalol, nifedipine)
- are expecting their baby to be small
- are expecting twins or triplets

How do I express my breastmilk?

The best way to do this is by hand

1. Have your syringe ready before you start
2. Get comfortable and start with a gentle breast massage
3. Stroking from the back of your breast towards your nipple for one or two minutes
4. Cup your breast with your thumb and fingers in a 'C' shape about 2-3 cm back from the base of your nipple
5. Gently squeeze your fingers and thumb together in a rhythmic action; it may take a while before you see any colostrum appear



6. If no colostrum appears after a few minutes simply move your fingers a fraction forward or back and try again to find the right spot
7. Only expect a few drops at a time
8. When the drops stop, move your fingers around to try a different section of your breast and then swap to the other breast.

If you find this is not working for you, speak to your midwife and they will give you some tips, there is also an excellent video provided by Unicef at the following location:

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/>

How should I collect my milk?

The antenatal clinic staff will provide you with small syringes and caps, which you can use to collect your milk. You can express your colostrum 2 or 3 times each day into the same syringe, keeping the syringe in the fridge between collections and using a new syringe every day. The syringes can then be capped, **labelled with your name, the date and time you expressed** and put into a freezer bag.

How do I store my milk?

You can store your milk in the fridge for up to 3 days where you don't know the exact temperature or 5 days in a fridge running at 4 °C or lower. You can also freeze your milk.

When you are coming into hospital to have your baby, bring your colostrum in a cool bag with an ice pack or use a plastic bag packed with ice. This will keep your milk cool or frozen.

Give your milk to the midwife when you arrive so that it can be stored safely

If you require this information in an alternative language or format (such as Braille, audiotape or large print), please ask the staff who are looking after you.