

# BREASTFEEDING: Learn it and start early!

## HOW TO EXPRESS COLOSTRUM OR BREASTMILK

Starting at 37 weeks of pregnancy



# Expression of colostrum near the end of pregnancy

## Breastfeeding: Learn it and start early!

In the few weeks before your baby is born, you can start expressing colostrum or first milk from your breasts. This will allow you to learn and practice the manual breast expression technique. Colostrum is the recommended food for all newborns. Keep it in the freezer and bring it with you when you come to deliver your baby.

### **Who can do manual expression?**

All pregnant people, except for those with placenta praevia, low inserted placenta or if you currently have a cervical cerclage.

### **When can I start manually expressing my colostrum?**

Consult your perinatal doctor, midwife, perinatal nurse or lactation consultant before starting to express colostrum during pregnancy. You can start expressing your colostrum as of 37 weeks of pregnancy, 3 to 5 minutes per breast, 1 to 3 times a day. Stop expressing if you experience uterine cramps or painful contractions. Remember that it is never too late to start expressing your colostrum. Studies (1,2) have shown that manually expressing colostrum at the end of pregnancy or before birth can help ripen the cervix and could reduce the risks of needing a post term induction of labor. It can also allow to have more confidence and ease in your abilities to breastfeed your newborn baby.

1. Women's Perspectives on antenatal breast expression: a cross-sectional survey. Frankie J. Fair, Helen Watson, Rachel Gardner and Hora Soltani .  
2. Breast stimulation for cervical ripening and induction of labour. Cochrane Database Systematic Review. Kavanagh J, Kelly AJ, Thomas J. 2005 Jul 20 ; 2005(3):CD003392. doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD003392.pub2. PMID: 16034897; PMCID: PMC8713553.

### **What is colostrum and why is it so important?**

Colostrum is a thick liquid available in very small quantities. It is a food that is perfectly suited to the needs of your newborn baby. Because it is digested quickly and has a laxative effect, it helps your newborn baby to pass their first bowel movements quickly and in turn reduces the risks of jaundice. In addition, it helps to protect your newborn baby against several infections and helps stabilize their blood sugar.

### **What happens if I am unable to express colostrum?**

Some people will be unable to express colostrum before birth. Don't worry, this has no influence on your colostrum/milk supply after giving birth.



## Required supplies

- 1 ml and 3 ml syringes with caps to store your colostrum/milk. (They are usually easy to purchase from your local pharmacy).
- Spoon or clean container.
- Adhesive labels, to label your syringes with your name and the date you collected your colostrum.
- Hard container with lid or sealable plastic bags suited for freezing.

## How to transport your colostrum

Put the syringes in a cooler or bag with icepacks to transport your syringes to the birthing unit.

## How to do a breast massage

To relax your breast before expressing colostrum/milk, try a massage technique. The idea is to use the knuckles to gently stimulate the breast.

- First, clean your hands.
- Make a fist and keep it closed throughout the massage.
- Place the knuckle of your index finger at the top of your chest and roll your knuckles down toward the nipple.
- To massage the underside of the breast, place the knuckle of your little finger against your ribs and roll your knuckles up toward the nipple.
- Move your fist around the breast, repeating the rolling motion.
- Work your way around the breast once or twice, then start expressing colostrum/milk.

***The Massage should not be painful. You can repeat the massage once or twice while you are expressing colostrum/milk.***

### Links to videos and information

How to express your first milk    Attaching your baby at the breast    From Tiny Tot to Toddler



## How to express colostrum/milk by hand

Manual expression is a technique every breastfeeding parent should learn. It's the most effective way to express colostrum; you can use it anytime, anywhere to relieve an engorged breast, and it's free. The technique is easier than it sounds. Ask hospital staff, your midwife or a CLSC nurse to teach it to you.

- Use a clean spoon or container. Do not attempt to collect directly with the syringe.
- Lean forward slightly so the colostrum/milk can flow into the spoon or container.
- Form a «C» with your thumb and index finger. The tip of each digit should line up like a pair of pliers (see photo no 1).
- Place your thumb and index finger on either side of the nipple, 2 to 5 cm (1 to 2 inches) away. With practice, you'll find the ideal distance for you (see photo no.2)
- Press your fingers into your breast, pushing horizontally toward the ribs (see photo no.3)
- While maintaining pressure on your fingers, bring your thumb and index finger together as if they were a pair of pliers. You don't need to press hard. This motion shouldn't leave any marks on your breast or cause any pain.
- Repeat these motions several times, reproducing the same rhythmic manner.
- Work your way around the breast with your fingers for a few minutes or until the dripping slows down.

**Be careful not to slide your fingers along your breast.** Maintain firm pressure on your breast without stretching the nipple, which is painful and not very effective.

From Tiny tot to Toddler <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/en/tiny-tot>

Global Health Media videos:

How to express your first milk <https://globalhealthmedia.org/videos/how-to-express-your-first-milk/>

Attaching your baby at the breast <https://globalhealthmedia.org/videos/attaching-your-baby-at-the-breast/>

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Reference and photos: Doré, N., Le Hénaff, D. (2022). From tiny tot to toddler. A practical guide for parents from pregnancy to age two. Institut National de santé publique du Québec, 2022

