

Maternity Services

Expressing your Breastmilk in the Antenatal Period

Hand expressing is the process of gently squeezing milk out of your breast. It is an important skill to learn before your baby is born. This leaflet contains instructions, but you can also ask your community midwife to show you how.

Why should I consider expressing my breastmilk in the antenatal period (before giving birth)?

Some babies may find it harder to feed or have a low blood sugar in the first few hours of life, and so need a little extra milk. This is more likely to happen if:

- you have pre-existing or gestational diabetes
- you are having an elective caesarean section
- your pregnancy is considered high risk for any other reason.

The midwives at the hospital will assist you and your baby to master the skill of breastfeeding, but your baby may need milk while you are learning. If you express breastmilk antenatally, you can feed your baby with this instead of giving formula milk.

Who can express breastmilk antenatally?

You! All women from 37 weeks of pregnancy can express their breastmilk and store it at home in preparation for your baby's arrival. Your midwife will discuss this with you at your 36 week appointment and will offer you a demonstration if you wish.

How do I express my breastmilk?

- Start by making sure your hands are clean and you have a sterilised container or syringe ready.
- Make sure you are in a comfortable position and are as relaxed as possible. Some women find a bath or shower useful before expressing to aid the flow of their breastmilk.
- Massage your breasts gently prior to hand expressing. This will aid the flow.
- Cup your breast with your hand creating a 'C' shape.
- Feel back from the end of the nipple to where the texture of your breast feels different (2-3cm back from the nipple).
- Using your thumb and index finger, gently compress the tissue. It should not hurt.
- Release the pressure, then repeat again and again, building up a rhythm. Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin.
- Milk should start to flow. The first milk (colostrum) is very concentrated and may be yellow in colour. It is very thick and will come out of your breast drop by drop.
- If the milk does not flow, try moving your fingers slightly toward the nipple or slightly further away to find the spot that works best for you.
- When the flow slows down, move your fingers around the breast (like moving around the numbers on a clock face) so that you have expressed the milk from all the way around your breast.
- Express from the other breast.

A good video can be accessed online at the following web address:

