

Collecting colostrum before you give birth

I kohi ai te waiū motuhake i mua o te whānautanga

Patient Information – Maternity Services

When it is anticipated that a pēpi (baby) may have difficulty maintaining their blood sugar levels or experience significant feeding challenges, expressing colostrum before birth means your pēpi may have a supply of your milk available. This may reduce or even eliminate the need for infant formula use.

Colostrum

Colostrum is the fluid that you make at the end of pregnancy and during the first days after birth. It is the ideal first food for your pēpi and every drop counts.

Colostrum contains high amounts of antibodies and other substances that help protect your pēpi from infections. It is high in energy and easily digested.

Collecting colostrum before birth is not for everyone. We recommend antenatal (before birth) colostrum collection for:

- Mothers/parents with diabetes in pregnancy.
- Mothers/parents who have a history of breastfeeding difficulties or low milk supply.
- People who have had previous breast/chest surgery or identified breast/chest tissue anomalies.
- Mothers/parents with pēpi known to have any condition that will affect their ability to breastfeed/chestfeed.
- Any parent who is likely to be separated from their pēpi where admission to NICU is planned.

How to collect colostrum before birth

- Discuss with your midwife.
- Start collecting from 36 weeks onwards.
- Hand express for 3-5 minutes, 1-3 times a day on each breast/side.
- Collect colostrum in sterile containers (1 mL syringes or sterile pottles may be provided by the midwife when discussing this with you or purchase 1 mL syringes from a chemist).
- Be aware that even with good hand expressing technique, there may be nothing or only small amounts of colostrum to collect. This is **normal**, and unrelated to how much milk you may produce once your pēpi is born. Hand expressing is a useful breastfeeding/chestfeeding skill to learn before the birth of your pēpi.

Storage

- You can use each syringe or pottle over a 24-hour period, refrigerating in between expressions before freezing.
- Ensure each collection is labelled with your name and date of expression prior to freezing in a zip-lock bag.
- Frozen colostrum can be stored for 3 months in the freezer or for 6-12 months in a deep freezer.
- Ensure that colostrum stays frozen when you take it with you to the hospital for labour and birth.
- Let staff know you have frozen colostrum with you to ensure it is stored safely.

After the birth of your pēpi

- Immediate skin-to-skin contact with your pēpi supports breastfeeding/chestfeeding and is best when uninterrupted for at least an hour and ideally until after the first feed.
- Breastfeed/Chestfeed within the first two hours after birth and get to know the feeding cues of your pēpi.
- Ideally, to reduce the risk of pēpi having low blood sugars, breastfeeding/chestfeeding should be frequent and unrestricted – watch your pēpi for feeding cues, not the clock.
- When showering, try to avoid washing your breasts/chest so as not to remove the amniotic imprint your pēpi has left there.
- Always breastfeed/chestfeed first, then use your collected colostrum if your pēpi requires extra due to low blood sugars.
- Avoid infant formula unless clinically indicated.

How to express by hand

STEP ONE



- Wash your hands.
- Keep your breasts/chest warm.
- Start by warming and massaging your breasts/chest in a gentle circular or sweeping motion towards the nipple.

STEP TWO



- Position your thumb and fingers in a 'C' shape, 2 to 3 cm back from the centre of your nipple.
- Push directly back towards the chest wall into the breast/chest tissue.

STEP THREE



- Gently press and release, press and release, and keep repeating. It may take a few minutes for any colostrum to appear.
- Do not pinch or squeeze the nipple.
- Collect any colostrum into a small syringe.

STEP FOUR



- Hand expressing should not be painful.
- Move your fingers round to a different part of your breast/chest and repeat steps 2-4 for up to 5 minutes.
- Repeat on the other side.

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Expressed colostrum/breastmilk (EBM)

STORED IN FREEZER ON MATERNITY WARD

We recognise you have gone to a lot of trouble to obtain colostrum/breastmilk either before or after birth. You are welcome to store your EBM in the freezer on the Maternity Ward on Level 5. Please label the bag and syringes with your name and the date you had your pēpi.

However, there is limited space, and you will need to remove any unused EBM and take it home when you are discharged from hospital. Please bring a small chilly bag with a frozen ice pack within, to keep your colostrum syringes frozen on the way home.

Due to space and storage issues, if your EBM has not been removed after one week following your discharge, we will have to discard it.

Collection points for syringes

- Christchurch Women's Hospital, Women's Outpatients (Ground floor)
- Kurawaka Waipapa
- Rangiora Maternity Unit
- Oromairaki Maternity Unit
- Ashburton Maternity Unit
- Midwifery Resource Centre, 376 Manchester Street