

Collecting Colostrum Before Delivery

What IS colostrum?

Colostrum is an amazing fluid that breasts make during pregnancy and for the first 2-4 days after your baby is born. It is full of protection against infection and often referred to as “liquid gold” because it is precious and dark yellow in color.

Why would I want to collect it?

- People with diabetes or high blood pressure sometimes need a little more time for their mature milk to “come in,” and extra colostrum can be useful. Babies born to people with diabetes are also at risk for low blood sugar soon after birth, so you could use this colostrum to improve their blood sugar level.
- You might also want to practice hand expressing before birth, so you are comfortable with it when your baby is born. If your baby is not breastfeeding well, you can hand express into a spoon and feed them after nursing to help increase your milk production sooner and give them some more to eat so they do not lose too much weight.

When should I collect it?

- **Please check with your delivering provider to be sure it is safe for you to stimulate your nipples in this way.** Nipple stimulation releases oxytocin into your bloodstream, which causes “let-downs” when you are breastfeeding as well as uterine contractions during the birth process. Most parents can express colostrum safely after 36 weeks. (See the [DAME study](#) - it showed it was safe for women with diabetes to hand express twice a day starting at 36 weeks.) If you do feel contractions when hand expressing, stop and call your provider.

How should I collect it?

- Once a day after a shower is a good time to try. Warmth helps with relaxation and “let-down.” Other times of day, just wash your hands first. Depending on your results, you may decide to express 1-3 times a day.
- **DO NOT BE CONCERNED IF YOU CANNOT COLLECT ANY COLOSTRUM BEFORE YOUR BABY IS BORN!** It does NOT predict how much mature milk you will be able to make. Here is a [video](https://vimeo.com/291805110) (https://vimeo.com/291805110) with tips. Hand expression is a skill that usually requires practice to do well and easily. You may get nothing, drops or a teaspoon. If you would like a lactation consultant to help you with the technique, please call for an appointment.
- MilkWorks sells commercial kits developed specifically for colostrum collection, or you can use sterile 1-3ml syringes with caps.
- Hand express small amounts into the container or suck up one drop at a time.



- We do not have research on storing colostrum, but common sense would suggest that you put the container in the refrigerator after adding small amounts throughout the day, freezing once the container is full or after 12 hours have passed since the first colostrum was collected.
- Try and store the containers in a deep freezer or toward the back of a freezer that is part of a refrigerator, so the temperature is as stable as possible. (See Collecting and Storing Pumped Breastmilk) Why not use a pump? It usually does not work as well as your hands for removing the thick colostrum, and the small volumes get lost in the parts.

How/when do I use the collected colostrum?

- Use the syringe or the Haaka brand container to feed drops at a time to your baby in the corner of their mouth or use a spoon to have your baby lap the milk up with their tongue as in the video. Do this in the first few days after birth if there are concerns about blood sugar, poor effort at your breast or excessive weight loss. Reach out to the hospital you plan to deliver your baby for details about where the colostrum can be stored during delivery or post-partum (if a cooler is needed or a small fridge is available) and how the syringe should be labeled with your identifying information.
- If you do not need to use it in the early days, you can give the colostrum to your baby at any time! You could give it when they get their first cold, for concentrated immune protection. But your fresh milk may contain more specific antibodies to that infection if YOU were exposed as well.
- If you are concerned about the need to supplement in the hospital, please ask your baby's provider if donor human milk will be available. Some hospitals require an official order from them to use it.