Expressing your milk antenatally

Information and advice for mothers with diabetes

Maternity

Why should I express my milk antenatally?
If you are a mother with diabetes, in the first few hours of life your baby may have a short time when their blood sugar is low. During this time they will need a little extra milk and you will be encouraged to give your baby frequent feeds to help prevent this.

It would be helpful if you have already expressed some of your breastmilk. Expressing your milk means squeezing milk out of your breast. If your baby does need extra milk, this can be given to them instead of formula milk. The ideal time to have expressed your milk is before your baby is born.

Can women who are not diabetic express milk antenatally too?
Yes. Any expectant mother can express her breast milk from 37 weeks of 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. This will include babies who:

- have a mother with high blood pressure
- have a mother taking beta-blockers to control their blood pressure (e.g. labetalol)
- are expected to be small
- are twins or triplets

What are the benefits of breastfeeding?
Giving your baby just breast milk and nothing else to eat or drink for around the first 6 months has many health benefits and can reduce both your and your newborn baby’s chance of getting diabetes.

- Babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop childhood diabetes.
- It is thought that cow’s milk (the main ingredient of formula milk) can trigger diabetes in some babies; this is probably more likely for your baby if you or your partner have diabetes. Therefore, it is very important that mothers who are diabetic avoid giving their baby formula milk if at all possible until the baby is at least 6 months old.
- If you have gestational diabetes (diabetes that develops during pregnancy) you are less likely to go on to develop diabetes in later life if you breastfeed your baby.

What are the risks of expressing your breast milk?
You may find that when you express, you feel your womb going hard and relaxing – these are ‘Braxton Hicks’ contractions. This is normal, however in some rare cases they can begin to feel like period-type cramps or mild labour contractions. If this happens you should stop expressing and rest.
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If they don’t stop and you think you might be in early labour, you should telephone the Delivery Suite as you have been advised to do by your midwife.

How to express your breast milk
If you have diabetes and are insulin-dependent you may find that you need less insulin when you are breastfeeding and that you need to eat more.

Hand expressing milk simply means squeezing milk out of your breast, and this is how you do it:

1. Cup your breast with your hand and feel back from the end of the nipple to where the texture of your breast feels different.
2. Using your thumb and index finger, gently squeeze this area. This shouldn’t hurt.
3. Release the pressure and then repeat again and again, building up a rhythm. Avoid sliding your fingers over the skin.
4. Milk should start to flow. Because the first breast milk (colostrum) is very concentrated, it is thick, and will come out of your breast drop by drop. Collect this in a small container (please see below for advice on how to store the milk)
5. If the milk doesn’t flow, try moving your fingers slightly towards the nipple or further away, find the spot that works best for you.
6. 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.
7. Express from the other breast repeating steps 1-6.

How often can I express?
You can express your milk as often as you want to.

How much breastmilk will I get?
The amount of breast milk you get will vary from a few drops to a teaspoon. This small amount is perfect for your baby as first breastmilk is very concentrated in nutrients and helps your baby to fight infections.
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How should I store the expressed milk?
You will need to collect the milk in clean containers. The antenatal clinic staff will provide you with small syringes you can use to store the milk in. The syringe can then be put into a small plastic bag. You will need to label it with your name, the date and time you expressed.

You can store milk in the fridge at a temperature of 2 - 4°C for 3 – 5 days, or in the freezer for up to 6 months. If you do not know the temperature in your fridge at home then only store it for 48 hours.

If you start expressing at 37 weeks it will be best to store that milk in the freezer. If you know you are going to be induced the next day, then you can store that milk in the fridge.

When you come in to have your baby
Don’t forget to bring any breast milk you have expressed with you when you come into hospital to have your baby. Let your midwife know you have it with you and she will arrange for it to be stored in the fridge/freezer.

If your breast milk is frozen, then the best way to transport it is in a cool bag with a blue cool block alongside it.

Contact details
If you have any more questions about expressing your milk antenatally please speak to your midwife or phone the Infant Feeding Team: 07816 061 633.

If you have any questions or concerns about your pregnancy or giving birth, please contact the maternity unit on one of the following numbers:

Antenatal clinic: 0121 507 4388
Delivery Suite/Labour Ward: 0121 507 5449
Maternity Triage: 0121 507 4181

Further information
For further information about breastfeeding you can contact:

La Leche League Breastfeeding: 0845 120 2918
National Breastfeeding Helping: 0300 100 0212
Breastfeeding Community Service: 0121 622 6603

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.
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Sources used for the information in this leaflet

• Breastfeeding Review, ‘Expressing and storing colostrum antenatally for use in the newborn period’, November 2006
• Journal of Diabetes Nursing, ‘Colostrum harvesting and type 1 diabetes’, March 2005