

Birth by Bushra

A GUIDE FROM BIRTH BY BUSHRA

Colostrum *Harvesting*

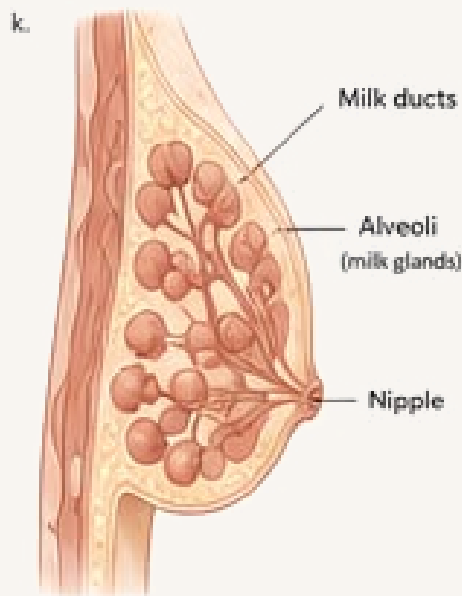
Everything you need to know before your baby arrives. Preparing for your breastfeeding journey begins before birth.



MIDWIFERY-LED CARE · UAE

I What is Colostrum?

Colostrum is your baby's first milk, often called liquid gold. It is a thick, concentrated milk produced during pregnancy and during the first few days after birth. Although only very small amounts are produced, these volumes are perfectly designed for your newborn's tiny stomach.



Colostrum is made in the alveoli – the milk glands – and travels to your baby through the milk ducts.

Colostrum is rich in antibodies (particularly IgA), white blood cells, proteins, vitamins, minerals and growth factors that help protect your baby while their immune system develops. For most healthy, full-term babies, colostrum is all they need during the first few days after birth.

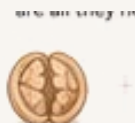
As the placenta is delivered, progesterone levels fall and milk production naturally begins to increase. Mature milk usually starts to transition in around days 3–5 after birth (often around day 4), although this timing varies between mothers. Until then, frequent breastfeeding and small amounts of colostrum are exactly what nature intended.

YOUR NEWBORN'S TINY STOMACH

Your baby's stomach is very small at birth, which is why small amounts of colostrum are all they need.



Day 1 – 5–7 mL (cherry)



Day 3 – 22–27 mL (walnut)



Day 7 – 45–60 mL (apricot)



1 month – 80–150 mL (large egg)

2 Why Harvest Colostrum?

Harvesting allows you to collect and freeze your own colostrum before birth. It may be especially helpful if your baby has low blood sugar, is sleepy after birth, requires neonatal care, you experience a caesarean birth, have multiples, have diabetes in pregnancy, previous breastfeeding difficulties, or simply want to feel more prepared.

3 The Physiology of Colostrum

Your breasts begin producing colostrum from around 16–20 weeks of pregnancy. During pregnancy, high progesterone limits large milk production despite high prolactin levels. After birth, delivery of the placenta causes progesterone to fall, allowing prolactin to stimulate increased milk production.

Oxytocin is the hormone responsible for the let-down reflex. Relaxation, warmth, massage and gentle nipple stimulation all encourage oxytocin release.

WHAT ENCOURAGES OXYTOCIN RELEASE



Relaxation



Warmth



Massage



Nipple stimulation

4 Benefits for Mother and Baby

For baby: immune protection, healthy gut bacteria, blood sugar support, reduced infection risk, supports bowel function and may help reduce jaundice.

For mother: builds breastfeeding confidence, teaches hand expressing, helps you become familiar with your breasts and can reduce anxiety before birth.

5 Who Should Harvest?

- ♦ Women planning to breastfeed
- ♦ Diabetes in pregnancy
- ♦ Planned caesarean birth
- ♦ Multiple pregnancy
- ♦ Previous low milk supply
- ♦ Previous breastfeeding difficulties
- ♦ Mothers wanting to feel prepared

6 Who Should Speak to Their Midwife First?

SPEAK TO YOUR MIDWIFE BEFORE STARTING IF YOU HAVE

Placenta praevia, unexplained vaginal bleeding, threatened preterm labour, cervical cerclage, PPROM, previous spontaneous preterm birth, or if you have been advised to avoid nipple stimulation.

7 When Should I Start?

Most women can begin from 36 weeks' gestation after discussion with their maternity care provider. Aim for 5–10 minutes, once or twice daily. There is no target volume.

8 What You'll Need

- ♦ Sterile 1 mL syringes
- ♦ Syringe caps

- ♦ Labels
- ♦ Zip freezer bags
- ♦ A small clean container
- ♦ Cool bag and ice packs

9 Preparing to Harvest

Taking time to relax helps your body release oxytocin. Wash your hands, empty your bladder, wear comfortable clothing, prepare your equipment, and choose a quiet space.



Wash your hands



Empty your bladder



Get comfortable



Take slow deep breaths



Have your equipment
ready

10 Create a Relaxing Environment

Take a warm shower, use a warm compress, dim the lights, play calming music, practise slow breathing, gently massage your breasts and think about meeting your baby. Oxytocin thrives in a calm environment.



11 Breast Massage

Massage from the outside of the breast towards the nipple using gentle circular movements. Spend 2–3 minutes preparing each breast before hand expressing.



Work around the whole breast, massaging from the outer areas towards the nipple. Avoid squeezing or rubbing the nipple.

12 Hand Expressing Technique

The purpose of hand expressing is not simply to collect colostrum. Gentle massage and nipple stimulation encourage the release of oxytocin, helping prepare your body for breastfeeding. The goal is to compress the breast tissue, not the nipple.

Some women collect several millilitres. Others collect only a few drops. Some collect nothing at all. All of these outcomes are completely normal. Even if no colostrum is collected, you are still practising an invaluable breastfeeding skill, becoming familiar with your breasts and stimulating oxytocin through gentle breast and nipple stimulation.

THE TECHNIQUE

1



C-shape

Place thumb above the nipple and fingers opposite underneath.

2



Push back

Gently push your hand back towards your chest wall.

3



Compress

Compress the breast tissue gently between thumb and fingers.

4



Release

Release completely and relax your hand.

5



Repeat & rotate

Repeat in a gentle rhythm, rotating around the breast.

Avoid sliding your fingers, pulling or pinching the nipple.

AVOID THESE COMMON MISTAKES



Pulling the nipple



Sliding fingers over the skin



Pinching the nipple



Rubbing the skin

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Don't measure your success by the amount you collect. Antenatal hand expressing is about preparing your body and building confidence. Whether you collect 10 mL, 1 mL or nothing at all, you are still stimulating oxytocin and learning a valuable skill.

13 Collecting Colostrum

Initially you may collect nothing, one drop, a few drops, half a syringe, 0.2 mL or 1 mL. Every amount is valuable. Use the sterile syringe to collect each drop.



Every drop is precious.

14 Storage

Cap the syringe immediately, label it with your name, date and time expressed, and freeze as soon as possible. Store at -18°C or colder, following your hospital's local guidance.

15 Bringing It to Hospital

Transport frozen colostrum in a cool bag with ice packs and inform your midwife on arrival that you have brought frozen antenatal colostrum.



- ♦ Use a cool bag with ice packs.
- ♦ Keep syringes upright in a sealed bag.
- ♦ Tell your midwife as soon as you arrive that you have frozen colostrum.

16 Frequently Asked Questions

I only got one drop. Perfectly normal.

My breasts don't leak. Also completely normal.

Will this bring on labour? For uncomplicated pregnancies, beginning hand expressing around 36 weeks has not been shown to increase birth complications. Always follow the advice of your maternity care provider.

How much should I collect? There is no target. Every drop is valuable.



Final Thoughts

Every pregnancy is unique. Some women collect 20 mL, others collect only a few drops, and some collect nothing at all. All of these are normal. Your confidence, your technique and the oxytocin stimulation you create are just as important as the colostrum you collect.

Every drop is uniquely designed for your baby.

Birth by Bushra