

# Hand Expression Technique

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During the first few days after delivery, your breasts will produce colostrum. This special milk is full of nutrients and antibodies for your baby.

Most newborns have a very good feeding at the breast immediately after delivery and then sleep for several hours. It is common for babies to be sleepy for most of their first day of life. If your infant is experiencing a sleepy phase and is not ready to breastfeed at least every 3 hours, we recommend **hand expression** as an effective technique for removing colostrum.

## How do I express colostrum or breast milk by hand?

- Begin by gently massaging your breasts
- Position your thumb above the nipple and your first two fingers below the nipple approximately 1 inch from the tip of the nipple.
- Your hand should form the letter “C” with your fingers on opposite sides of your areola.
- Avoid cupping the breast.
- **Press** straight back toward the chest wall keeping your fingers in position
- Be careful not to pull the fingers apart or stretch the skin.
- **Compress** your thumb and fingers forward at the same time to compress the milk ducts
- **Release** the pressure and relax your hand while leaving your fingers in their original position
- Repeat this sequence rhythmically for several minutes
- Try rotating the position of your thumb and fingers to compress other milk ducts

## **This technique is painful. Am I doing something wrong?**

- Avoid squeezing the breast which can cause bruising
- Avoid sliding hands over the breast which can cause skin irritation
- Avoid pulling or pinching the nipple which can result in tissue damage

## **How much colostrum can I expect to see with hand expression?**

At birth, your baby's stomach is very small (about the size of a marble) so colostrum is produced in very small quantities.

Don't expect to see a great deal of colostrum immediately. You may only be able to express a few drops at first. Add massage whenever you like and try moving your hand to a different position to remove milk from other ducts.

## **What do I do with the colostrum I have expressed?**

You can collect your colostrum in a spoon or a medicine cup by holding it underneath the nipple while you hand express.

If your baby is ready to take a meal, your nurse can teach you how to feed your baby from the spoon or medicine cup. If your baby is not ready to eat, you can store the colostrum in a bottle or syringe for the next feeding.

Colostrum can be stored at room temperature for 6-8 hours or in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

## **How Can I Get More Practice?**

You can view a demonstration of how to hand express at the following link:  
<http://www.newborns.stanford.edu/Breastfeeding/HandExpression.html>.

During your hospital stay, this video is available through the Get Well Network on your television. Search for the title, "Hands On Pumping."

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