

Colostrum Milk Feedings in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)



The benefits of breastfeeding while your child is in the hospital.

Colostrum is the early milk that your body makes. Colostrum contains proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals and high amounts of antibodies (proteins) and other substances that fight disease-causing bacteria and viruses. Providing colostrum to your baby can protect them from infection, bowel diseases and other complications.

How is colostrum special and why is it important to my baby?

After birth, large amounts of protective antibodies, live cells and substances move from mother's bloodstream into colostrum. The first milk/colostrum produced by a mother has the highest amount of protective substances; the second milk expressed is the next highest and so on. Colostrum production gradually decreases with time. **Colostrum from mothers who deliver very prematurely has higher amounts of protective substances than that of a mother with a full-term baby. Therefore, preterm colostrum is especially protective for premature babies.**

How do I get started?

Each new mother recovering in our Mother-Baby Care Unit has access to a video and lactation consultants who can help you with learning how to breastfeed and express milk from your breasts. Ask your nurse for assistance.

If you are recovering at another hospital or your baby is coming after you've already recovered from your delivery, the NICU staff will provide you with a video to help you with milk expression.

Our team will have you watch a short video on hand expression of breast milk. Hand expression, with breast massage, is a simple method for new mothers to express and collect colostrum in the first few days after delivery when milk production is expected to be low. **Hand expression, with breast massage, is used in addition to a breast pump until your milk production increases.**

How is the milk stored and what do I do with it once it's collected?

Containers and labels will be provided for you by our team to collect any milk you express (even if it's just a few drops). Bring the milk to the NICU as soon as it's collected so that it can be immediately fed to your baby. If you cannot come to the NICU, let your nurse know you have expressed some milk and they can arrange for it to be brought to the NICU.

What if I am taking medications for pain or other problems after delivery?

Do not throw away or discard your colostrum, most medications that mothers need after delivery are safe to take while providing milk to their child. You can always talk with your doctor and/or nurse and they can confirm if the medication(s) you are taking are safe for you to take while breastfeeding.

In order to ensure safety, simply write the name of the medication(s) you are taking on the label provided for your milk so the doctors and nurses caring for your baby in the NICU can decide if the milk is safe for your child.

What if I still have questions?

If you still have questions about expressing milk for your baby or you are having any difficulties, please contact NICU lactation consultants at 808-983-8673 and we will help you.

