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Colostrum – Liquid Gold for Babies

You are pregnant or have just given birth? Perhaps you are just now thinking about how you want to feed your baby. However you decide or whether everything goes as you had imagined it would, Nature is preparing a very special gift for the newborn – colostrum!



Foto: © Andrea Hemmelmayr

Your breasts are already producing this first, valuable milk - the colostrum - in late pregnancy. The small amount is just right for the newborn who is gradually adjusting to life outside the womb.

Sucking has to be learned and, at first, the digestive tract only tolerates small portions. Therefore, frequent but small meals make more sense. These small amounts also contain the necessary nutrients, minerals, fluid and, above all, numerous antibodies, which protect the newborn from infections – a first passive immunization. Furthermore, the colostrum is rich in growth factors, which support the maturation and the lining of the digestive tract and, thereby, hinder colonization by disease-causing germs, so that a healthy intestinal flora can develop. Colostrum speeds up the excretion of the first bowel movement (meconium) so that bilirubin is thoroughly excreted and newborn jaundice is prevented. Moreover, the metabolism is stimulated by the colostrum and the blood sugar level is stabilized.

The milk of mothers whose babies are born too early is called “pre-term milk”. Even with increasing production, it remains for some time in the stage of pre-milk and thus, supplies antibodies to the particularly vulnerable pre-term baby for longer.

If you start breastfeeding with no problems, be happy about this lovely gift of Nature.

But what if you don't want to – or cannot – breast-feed, if you are separated from your baby, if the breastfeeding start doesn't go as well as you expected or, if perhaps you have even already experienced a problematic breastfeeding period? It is almost always possible to provide a newborn with colostrum. He doesn't even need to suck at the breast. Hand-expression of colostrum in the first few days also does not interfere with a desired weaning before abundant milk production.

On the other hand, early colostrum expression and giving the baby that colostrum can positively support the future course of breastfeeding and possibly make the early use of infant formula unnecessary.

When does colostrum expression make sense?

- › If your baby cannot (yet) suck correctly or it is simply hard to wake him up
- › If you and your baby are separated early – especially with pre-term or sick babies
- › If you are not sure whether there is milk (colostrum) available
- › If you want to wean - particularly quickly after the birth
In some cases, it makes sense to begin expressing the colostrum during the pregnancy and freeze it (not before the 37th week)
- › If you suffer from diabetes or gestational diabetes, the baby can better stabilize his blood sugar with early colostrum feeding.
- › If you have struggled with the problem of “too little milk” in a previous breastfeeding period.
- › If you have had breast surgery
- › If your hormone state has made getting pregnant difficult.

REFERENCES:

- › BDL, Brustmassagen & Entleeren der Brust von Hand (Breast Massage & Hand-Expression of the Breast – auf Englisch nicht vorhanden)
Alternativ: <http://breastfeedingtoday-llli.org/hand-expression> or

ILCA (Inside Track): “Using Your Hands to Express Your Milk”.
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0890334413504642>
- › Benkert Brigitte; Einfach stillen; Urania Verlag (Dieses Buch ist 12 J alt: GU „Stillen“ S.50-51)
- › Weissman Gina; AME : AME: A Tool to Maximize Breastmilk Production in Challenging Cases, Lactation and Breastfeeding 4:2016, p. 12-14



IBCLC

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants are the only internationally approved breastfeeding and lactation specialists having a medical background.

The decision to breastfeed or not to breastfeed has short- and long-term impact on the health of child and mother. However, breastfeeding sometimes turns out to be difficult and perhaps professional, competent assistance is needed.



This is how you express colostrum:

- 1 After washing your hands, begin with a comfortable breast massage
- 2 Perhaps someone can help you collect the few, but valuable, drops with a small syringe or a small cup
- 3 Place your thumb and your index finger about 3–4 cm away from the mamille (nipple)
- 4 Press the breast tissue gently, but firmly, in the direction of the chest or rib cage.
- 5 Now, when you shorten the distance between the thumb and index finger, a milking, rolling movement occurs.
- 6 Repeat the movement and, after a little while, change the position of the fingers (i.e., instead of 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock – 9 o'clock and 3 o'clock)

With a little practice, the first drops of colostrum can soon be collected.

You can either dribble these drops into the baby's mouth immediately or store the colostrum in the refrigerator in the syringe or in a well-sealed cup or, possibly, store it temporarily in the freezer

Ask for help and have someone show you how the method works practically. Certainly IBCLCs* and midwives will gladly be of help

Contact your IBCLC