



Information for Breastfeeding Families

Colostrum First

Colostrum is the **“first milk”** that a breastfeeding mother produces in the weeks before delivery and in the early days of breastfeeding. It is just waiting for your baby to be born. This special milk is low in fat and high in carbohydrates, protein, and antibodies; it is also extremely easy to digest. Although the amount of colostrum is low, it is high in concentrated nutrition. It is the perfect first food!

If you worry that you have no milk the first few days after delivery, remember that a little bit of colostrum goes a long way. Put your baby to breast often for him to “sip” on colostrum. This helps bring in your “second milk,” the mature milk, sooner.

To help your baby get the full benefit from colostrum, make sure the first several feedings are colostrum. If supplementation becomes necessary for a medical concern, try expressing some of your own colostrum. You can express some colostrum by hand or use a breast pump and feed your pumped milk to your baby by spoon or syringe. Ask your lactation consultant for assistance. Make sure your baby’s gut is first protected by colostrum before other fluids are given.

- Colostrum has a laxative effect on your baby, helping him pass meconium which aids in the first bowel movements and helps prevent jaundice.
- Colostrum is often called “white blood” because it provides large amounts of living cells (lymphocytes and macrophages, similar to those in blood) which will defend your baby against infections and illnesses.
- Colostrum has an especially important role in protecting your baby’s gastrointestinal tract. A newborn’s intestines are very permeable (leaky). Colostrum seals the microscopic holes by “painting” the gastrointestinal tract with a barrier which prevents most foreign proteins (from food the mother has eaten or from infant formula) from penetrating the gut and possibly sensitizing your baby to an allergy.
- Colostrum is considered your baby’s first immunization because it contains large quantities of an antibody called secretory immunoglobulin A (sIgA).
- As breastmilk changes from colostrum to mature milk, the concentration of immune factors and antibodies decreases but the volume of breastmilk greatly increases. Therefore, the amount of infection fighters your baby receives remains fairly constant throughout breastfeeding.