

If your baby has been born early, very small, very ill, or with other medical problems you may be asked to consider expressing your breast milk.

Breastmilk is an essential part of your baby's treatment as it not only provides them with essential nutrition, but also provides protection from infections and promotes optimal growth and development of your baby's vital organs and brain. No medicine can offer your baby protection & stimulate development in this way. [Click here](#) to see a video further explaining the benefits and importance of colostrum for your baby.

Even if your baby is not being fed yet, breast milk can be used for cleaning your baby's mouth and pain relief. You will start by hand expressing your colostrum within 2 hours of birth, and then after a few days move on to using a hospital-grade breast pump. Midwives, and neonatal staff will teach you how to hand express and later use a breast pump. [Click here](#) to see the UNICEF Baby Friendly video showing how to hand express your milk.

Breast pumps are available on the postnatal wards and the neonatal unit, and the hospital has a small number of pumps that you can borrow to take home. Breast pumps can also be loaned from the charity [Tiny Life](#) for a small fee.

You will need to express 8-10 times in 24 hours to establish your milk supply, including at night. This is sometimes difficult when you are tired but is really important as one of the milk-producing hormones prolactin is at its highest level at night. Don't worry if you only get a few drops to begin with, every drop is precious. Your milk supply will increase with time, and help and advice is available if you experience any problems.