



Bryan Neonatal Intensive Care Unit

## Colostrum Milk Feedings in the NICU

Colostrum is the early milk that your body makes during the first few days after giving birth. It is different from the milk that is made later in lactation.

Colostrum contains high amounts of antibodies and other substances that help to protect babies in the Bryan Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) from infection, bowel diseases and other complications. Colostrum is like a medication for your baby, and every drop that you remove should be collected and saved. Even if your plans do not include breastfeeding, we encourage you to remove the colostrum from your breasts so it can be fed to your baby.

### Why is colostrum different from later milk?

At the time of birth, the breasts are going through many changes as they begin to make milk. In the first few days after birth, the breasts move large amounts of protective substances from the mother's bloodstream into the milk. One of these substances is Secretory Immunoglobulin A (sIgA), a special antibody that babies receive only through their mothers' milk.

Over the first week of lactation, changes in the breast reduce the amount of protective substances that move from the mother's bloodstream into the milk. This later milk remains very beneficial for babies, but the colostrum has the highest amount of protective substances.

### How long does colostrum last?

Colostrum does not suddenly stop being made. The breasts change gradually so the very first pumped milk is highest in protective substances; the second pumped milk is the next highest, and so on.

For most mothers, small drops of colostrum during the first few days give way to larger amounts of yellowish-colored transitional milk that is still very protective for babies. After several more days, mature milk, which is bluish-white, replaces the transitional milk.

Mothers who deliver very prematurely produce colostrum for a longer time, and their colostrum has higher amounts of protective substances than that of a mother with a full-term baby. This *preterm colostrum* is especially protective for premature babies.

### Should I throw away my colostrum because I am receiving medications for pain or another birth-related condition?

Do not throw away your colostrum. Nearly all medications that mothers need in the early days after giving birth can be taken while they provide milk. Your baby's doctors can decide about feeding this milk to your baby.

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