

Colostrum 101

Colostrum is the “first milk” and only substance that a breastfeeding mother produces in the first few days after baby’s birth. It develops weeks before delivery and in the early days of breastfeeding.

- This “liquid gold” is low in fat and high in carbohydrates, protein, and antibodies. Although the amount of colostrum that comes out is low, it is high in concentrated nutrition—it is the perfect first food!
- It’s very, very thick and consumed in small amounts (only a teaspoon per feeding in the first 24 hours!), so put baby to the breast often to eat.
- While colostrum is the natural “first milk,” baby may have feeding difficulties that make it more challenging to consume via their suck. If that’s the case, you can handexpress or pump and then spoon or syringe feed the colostrum to your baby.
- Colostrum has a laxative effect on your baby, helping him or her 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 is considered your baby’s first immunization because it contains large quantities of an antibody called secretory immunoglobulin A (sIgA).
- Colostrum has an especially important role in protecting your baby’s gastrointestinal tract. A newborn’s intestines are very permeable, but colostrum seals the gut by coating and creating a lining of the gastrointestinal tract. This prevents most foreign proteins (from food the mother has eaten or from infant formula) from penetrating the gut and possibly causing sickness or allergy.
- After 3-5 days of colostrum, a mom’s transitional milk comes in, which is a mix of colostrum and more mature milk until transitioning entirely to mature milk.

This guide was created in collaboration with Carrie Dean, IBCLC for Expectful, Inc.