

What is donor breast milk? Why and how is donor breast milk used on the neonatal unit?

Getting started with feeding your preterm baby

Your own breast milk is the best feed for your baby (or babies). The first milk you make is called colostrum. It protects your baby (or babies) from infection and encourages healthy bacteria to grow in your baby's gut.

If your preterm baby or babies are small or sick, they may not be able to feed from you at first. You will need to express to build your breast milk supply. Your nursing team will show you how to hand express as soon as your baby (or babies) are born.

When you first hand express, you will make 1 to 2 drops or up to a teaspoon of colostrum each time. You can collect the colostrum droplets with a syringe.

If you express 8 times in 24 hours (including once in the early hours of the morning) you will gradually make more milk each feed. Staff on the neonatal unit will help you to build your milk supply.

If your preterm baby or babies are small or sick, you may be offered donor breast milk. This helps feed your baby (or babies) while you build your own breast milk supply.

The neonatal unit uses donor breast milk supplied by a milk bank.

What is donor breast milk from a milk bank?

The neonatal unit uses donor milk from a milk bank. The milk bank accepts breast milk from mothers who make more breast milk than they need.

Mothers who donate their breast milk to the milk bank must give:

- information about their health and lifestyle
- blood samples to check for infection

Mothers who donate to the milk bank must follow rules around:

- hygiene
- cleaning and care of the expressing equipment
- storage of breast milk until the milk bank can collect the donated breast milk

The milk bank pasteurises the donated breast milk. This kills bacteria and viruses that could harm preterm babies. Donor breast milk is also tested to make sure it is safe.

Can I use donor milk that does not come from a milk bank?

It is recommended only milk from the milk bank is used for preterm babies. Preterm babies can struggle to fight infection. Only donor milk from a milk bank is safe for your baby.

Donor breast milk offered by other sources, for example over the internet, should not be used. This is because the source cannot be confirmed and you cannot be sure whether the donor or the milk has been screened for infections.

Will my baby be offered donor breast milk?

Breast milk reduces the risk of preterm babies developing necrotising enterocolitis (NEC).

NEC is a serious, life-threatening condition affecting the gut.

Your own breast milk is best at preventing NEC. Donor milk offers less protection. Both can be used to feed your baby (or babies) via tube feeding until they are breast or bottle fed.

Your baby (or babies) will be offered donor milk if you are building your milk supply but need extra milk to meet your baby's needs, and:

- your baby was born before 32 weeks
- your baby's birth weight was less than 1.5kg (1500g)

Your baby (or babies) will be offered donor milk if:

- your baby has recovered from NEC, and you do not have any of your own breastmilk available
- you cannot provide breast milk for medical reasons

How long will my baby need donor breast milk?

The risk of NEC becomes lower when your baby (or babies) gets older. Donor milk feeds will stop when your baby (or babies) are between 30 to 34 weeks. Formula can help if you need extra milk at this point.

Aim to provide as much of your own breastmilk as possible.

Donor milk feeds will stop sooner if:

- your breast milk supply meets your baby's needs
- your baby is not growing well

Useful websites for more information



UNICEF guidance on how to hand express



UKAMB information on milk banks & donor milk



BAPM use of donor milk in neonates



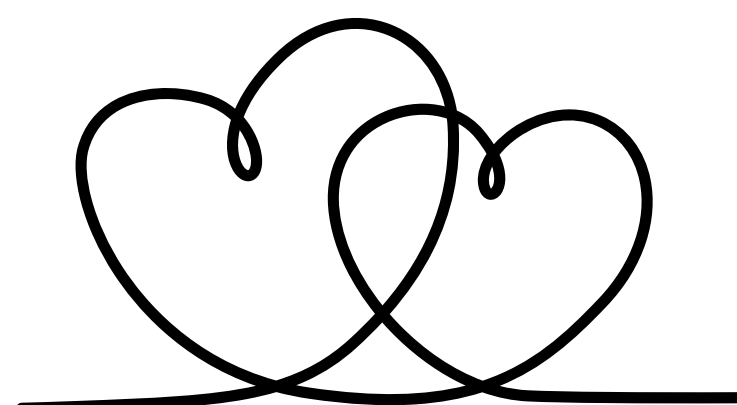
Bliss information on feeding preterm babies



Hearts Milk Bank



Donor milk & milk kinship



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