

# Using donor breast milk for your baby

## **What is donor breast milk?**

Mothers who have more breast milk than they need can choose to donate spare milk for premature and vulnerable babies. This milk is collected, tested and made safe for babies.

## **Why has donor breast milk been recommended for my baby?**

Donor breast milk can provide nutrition and protection. This is particularly important for babies born early (before 32 weeks gestation), have a birth weight less than 1800g, have a congenital heart condition or are recovering from surgery to their gut.

These babies have fragile digestive systems and are particularly at risk of developing necrotising enterocolitis (NEC), which is a serious gut illness.

Avoiding the use of formula milk for these babies is essential. If you were planning to use formula milk to feed your baby, this can be introduced gradually in a few weeks as your baby grows.

For all babies, their mother's breast milk is best at the start of their life. When this is not possible (perhaps because of illness, a medical condition, difficulty establishing a supply, or not wishing to breastfeed), donor breast milk is available should you wish to use it.

The decision to use donor breast milk can bring up many emotions and questions. The nurses and doctors caring for your baby are there to discuss these with you, to make sure that you are making the right decision for you and your baby.

## **What are the benefits of donor breast milk?**

- Donor breast milk can help protect babies against infection, but cannot prevent it.
- Research suggests donor breast milk may protect against NEC, a serious gut condition.
- A preterm baby's immature gut can absorb breast milk more easily compared to formula milk. Premature babies and babies who have had gut surgery are fed small amounts of breast milk which is gradually increased as this is tolerated.

## **Is donor breast milk safe?**

All donor breast milk is processed following the NICE Guidelines. All breast milk donors undergo strict health and lifestyle screening to become a donor. All donors also have a blood test to check for:

- HIV
- Hepatitis B and C
- HTLV I and II (human T-cell leukaemia viruses)
- Syphilis

Mothers who are approved to be breast milk donors are non-smokers, have good general health, have not had a recent medical procedure, have not recently had tattoos or body piercings, have no family exposure to TB, and have no increased risk of CJD.

## How is donor breast milk processed?

Each donor's breast milk is processed separately. Before pasteurisation (heat treatment to make the milk safe), a sample of breast milk is taken and sent for microbiology (infection) testing.

The breast milk is then put into sterile bottles and sealed with tamper-evident lids. These bottles of breast milk are then pasteurised. Pasteurisation makes the breast milk safe to give to babies. Each bottle is labelled with a unique number and expiry date.

A sample bottle of pasteurised breast milk is sent for microbiology testing. Then the batch is frozen.

The donor breast milk is only allowed to be used when microbiology testing shows that it is safe to do so.

## Useful information

Information about necrotising  
enterocolitis (NEC)

<https://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/resources/patient-information/necrotising-enterocolitis.pdf>

UK Association of Milk Banks  
[www.UKAMB.org](http://www.UKAMB.org)

UNICEF – Baby Friendly  
<https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly>

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about milk donation, please contact the Milk Bank on 020 7188 8846 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm). Out of hours, please contact the Special Care Baby Unit on 020 7188 8846.

## Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 3003 10am to 5pm, Mon to Fri  
**e:** [letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk)

## Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)  
**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)  
**e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

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