

Breast Milk Fortifier (BMF) for Your Baby

This factsheet is designed to provide information on the use of fortifier in neonatal care

Introduction

Breast milk is important for all babies, particularly those who are born prematurely, and acts like a medicine. As well as providing nutrients for growth breast milk contains many beneficial components. This helps keep babies healthy and protect them from infection and complications of being born prematurely or sick.

In the early days and weeks, preterm babies have a higher requirement for some nutrients including protein, vitamins and minerals to support their growth and development.

What is breast milk fortifier?

Breast milk fortifier (sometimes referred to as human milk fortifier or multi nutrient fortifier) is a powdered supplement added to expressed breast milk to provide additional protein, essential vitamins, minerals, and trace elements to support the growth and development of a preterm baby

Who should receive breast milk fortifier and why is it needed?

In the early days and weeks of life, it is recommended that BMF is given to some babies on the neonatal unit who are receiving breast milk. BMF provides additional nutrients to support babies growth and development¹

Research suggests that giving BMF may improve the growth and bone density in preterm infants in the short term²

How long is breast milk fortifier needed?

Breast milk fortifier will be used until baby's growth is increasing appropriately over time. The neonatal team will monitor baby's growth and discuss when BMF can be stopped

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How is breast milk fortifier given?

BMF is a powder which is measured out carefully according to requirements and dissolved in a specific amount of expressed breast milk. The neonatal team will guide how much BMF is required as part of the feeding plan.

BMF can either be mixed into expressed breast milk and given via a nasogastric tube, or in some neonatal units, it can be given orally prior to a breast or mixed into expressed breast milk and given in a bottle.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will my baby still need fortifier when they are breastfeeding?

If you would like to breastfeed your baby, your team will be able to show you how to continue to use breast milk fortifier using fortifier supplements- sometimes known as boosts or shots.

Can diet be adjusted to enhance nutrients in breast milk?

Increasing specific nutrients in mum's diet or introducing specific foods will not provide every additional nutrient in breast milk and breast milk fortifier may still be required. The maternal diet should include a healthy balanced diet with plenty of fluids to drink.

Are there any side effects of BMF?

BMF has been shown to be safe and avoids the need to give multiple different nutritional supplements. It has been used in neonatal units for over 20 years.

Is breast milk fortifier suitable for a vegan diet?

The protein in breast milk fortifier originates from cow's milk. There are currently no vegan alternatives available in the UK. Please discuss any concerns with the local neonatal team.

Please speak to your neonatal team if you have any more questions or need further information.

NDiG wishes to express huge thanks to all the families who completed our survey and to those who attended focus groups to help develop this leaflet.

References:

1. 2022 Enteral Nutrition in Preterm Infants: ESPGHAN Position Paper
2. Luling Lin et al. Cochrane Database of Systematic reviews: Multi-nutrient fortification of human milk for preterm infants.
3. Marino, Luise et al. Home use of breast milk fortifier to promote postdischarge growth and breast feeding in preterm infants: a quality improvement project. Arch Dis Child 2019;104:1007-1012.