

Donor Milk in the Neonatal Unit

This factsheet is designed to provide information on donor milk in neonatal care

Introduction

Breast milk is really important for all babies. It acts like a medicine and provides nutrients for growth. Breast milk contains many beneficial components. These help keep babies healthy and protects them from infection and complications of being born prematurely or sick.

In the early days and weeks, it is completely normal for mums to need time to build up their own milk supply when their baby is in the neonatal unit. Early and frequent expressing along with skin-to-skin contact with baby can help build up breast milk supply. The neonatal team can help to support and provide more information.

What is donor milk?

Donor milk is breastmilk that has been donated by mums who have more milk than needed to feed their own baby. It is processed to ensure it is safe for use. Donor milk is used to feed babies on the neonatal unit while mums are building up their supply(1).

What are the benefits of donor milk?

- Provides nutrition and acts as a bridge while mothers are building their own breast milk supply
- More easily digested when compared with formula milk
- Contains some of the beneficial components only found in breastmilk
- Offers greater protection against infection when compared with formula milk

Developed in collaboration with
parents by



Donor Breast Milk Journey



Who should receive donor milk and why is it needed?

In the early days and weeks of life, it is recommended (2) donor milk is given to some babies on the neonatal unit to provide milk feeds if mum's milk is in short supply.

Research (3) suggests that for preterm babies, donor milk may help to protect against Necrotising Enterocolitis (NEC), a gut related condition, which can be very serious.

It provides support for families and allows time to make decisions around feeding.

How long will Donor milk be used for?

Donor milk will only be used until there is enough mum's milk to meet baby's needs. Mum's milk will always be given first.

Once baby is on full milk feeds the continued use of any donor milk will be discussed with families by the neonatal team.

Will families be asked about using donor milk?

Families should be given information and an opportunity to ask questions before donor milk is used. Donor milk will not be used without agreement and consent from the family.

Are there any alternatives to donor milk?

Infant formula is an alternative to donor milk and contains all the nutrition needed to support baby's growth.

It does not contain any of the beneficial components present in breast milk.

Who can be a milk donor?

Once a mum has established her own breast milk supply, she may have more milk than is needed to feed her own baby. Any surplus milk can be donated to the local milk bank.

Information about donating breast milk can be found on the *UKAMB* website or by speaking with the local infant feeding team.

What is Milk Kinship?

Milk Kinship is an Islamic belief that human milk creates a kinship between the recipient of donor milk and the donor themselves.

For some families milk kinship may be an important consideration.

More information can be found by scanning this link.



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. [The Use of Donor Human Milk in Neonates | British Association of Perinatal Medicine](#)
2. [2022 Enteral Nutrition in Preterm Infants: ESPGHAN Position Paper | ESPGHAN](#)
3. [Does donor human milk prevent severe bowel disorders in very preterm or very low-birthweight infants? | Cochrane](#)