

North Carolina Women's Hospital

Donor Human Milk Fact Sheet: General Information



Breastfeeding is an important part of your baby's start in life. We encourage and support all mothers in breastfeeding and providing their own milk for their babies. Your milk offers the best nutrition and infection protection we can provide to your baby.

Sometimes, even with all your best efforts or for medical reasons, you are unable to provide all the milk your baby needs for feedings. We will discuss ways to help with getting more of your milk for your baby. We can also provide the option of donor human milk for your baby's feedings. Because it is more like your milk than any formula we have available, we want to give you information about donor milk.

What is donor human milk?

Donor human milk is collected from mothers who are breastfeeding or pumping milk for their own baby and have extra milk to give. These mothers are screened with the same blood tests as blood donors. The donor pumps her milk at home and stores it frozen until it is carried to the nearest human milk bank. There it is mixed with other donated milk, pasteurized (heated to a very high temperature), screened for bacteria, refrozen, and stored. Pasteurization destroys any bacteria and viruses that might be in the milk. Some, but not all of the live infection protecting cells in mother's milk are also destroyed. Other infection protecting parts of the milk remain active.

Why donor human milk?

We know that mothers’ milk provides the best nutrition and health benefits for new babies. When your milk is not available, we want to use the next best food for your baby. Like your own milk, donor milk provides good nutrition, is easy for your baby to digest, and does not increase your baby’s risk of infections and allergies.

How can my baby receive donor human milk?

Donor milk is ordered from a Licensed Milk Bank that follows the guidelines of the Human Milk Banking Association of North America and is stored at UNC Hospital ready for babies who need this supplemental milk. Our staff, including nurses, lactation consultants, and doctors can discuss with you the use of donor milk for your baby. If you choose to use donor milk, it will be used in addition to the mother’s milk you provide.

For most healthy term babies, donor milk will be used only a few days, until mom’s milk supply increases to meet the baby’s needs. For other babies, donor milk may be used longer as mom and baby work to establish breastfeeding. If your baby is still using donor milk when you are discharged to home, we can provide information if you desire to purchase donor milk for home use. , You will need to contact a Milk Bank, such as the WakeMed Mothers’ Milk Bank at WakeMed Hospital in Cary for milk availability and pricing. A prescription is required for those who wish to obtain donor milk after hospital discharge.

Our staff is happy to help you in making a plan for your transition to home.

We want to answer any questions or concerns that you have about using donor milk for your baby. Please use the space below to write questions that you want to have answered.

How can I become a milk donor in the future?

Many families who use donor milk are interested in donating milk in the future, to help other babies. The WakeMed Mothers’ Milk Bank, our local HMBANA Milk Bank, distributes over 150,000 ounces of milk each year, and is actively seeking new donors. If you are interested in becoming a donor, you can learn more at the milk bank’s website: <http://wakemed.org/body.cfm?id=135> Rev 12-2014