

Why Does my Premature Baby Need Donor Human Milk?

Mother's own milk is the best nourishment for premature babies, and it helps reduce the chances of serious complications during and after the NICU hospitalization.

However, when mother's own milk is not available, the World Health Organization, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the European Society of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition recommend feeding donor human milk. Donor human milk is much safer than formula milk for premature babies in the early days after birth.

But I want to provide my own milk for my baby. Why use donor human milk?

Premature babies need milk feedings in the first day or two after birth in order to lower the chances of infection and other NICU complications. However, mothers are often sick themselves with health problems or pregnancy and birth complications that can slow down the milk-making process. Donor human milk is the best solution until your own milk is flowing well.

I have been asked to sign a consent for donor human milk and I have not had the chance to pump my own milk.

Knowing the importance of very early milk feedings for premature babies AND the fact that mothers usually have a delay in milk-making, many NICUs ask mothers to sign a consent for donor human milk feedings almost immediately after birth. Rest assured that your milk — not donor human milk — will be the first feeding choice by the NICU doctors.

But I want to be the *only* milk provider for my baby.

In recent research, mothers reported that they wanted to be the only milk providers for their premature babies, and did not want to use "somebody else's milk." Many of these mothers said they felt *angry* and *resentful* because the donor mothers had extra milk while the mothers themselves were struggling to make the small amounts their babies needed. *Providing milk is a big part of being a new mother, and it is normal to feel angry or sad that you have to share this role with a donor mother — however brief it is.* The mothers in this study



said that they provided consent for donor human milk because they knew it was better for their baby than feeding formula.

How can I be sure that donor human milk is safe for my baby? What if the donor smoked or took medications?

Speak to the doctors in your NICU about these worries. In almost all NICUs, donor human milk comes from a certified milk bank that has strict tests for donor mothers to make sure that the milk is safe and nutritious. The donated milk is then pasteurized to kill germs—just like the milk you buy in the store.

Is donor human milk better than my own milk for my premature baby

Donor human milk is safer for your baby than formula milk, especially in the early days after birth when formula can cause problems. However, donor human milk is not as powerful as your own milk in nourishing your baby and lowering the chances of complications. The best protection from infection, bowel disease, breathing problems, as well as good growth come from YOUR milk. Donor human milk is only a short-term feeding choice until your own milk is established.

Created by: Paula Meier, PhD, RN;
Aloka Patel, MD and Judy Janes, RN, IBCLC



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We look forward to your inquiry at: contact@lactahub.org