

# Are my Medications Safe While I'm Providing Milk for my NICU Baby?

All mothers are concerned that the medications they must take to manage their own health conditions may pass into their milk and harm their baby.

This fear is even greater with a NICU baby, and NICU mothers are more likely to need medications to manage pregnancy and birth complications. Almost all medications are safe to use while providing milk for your NICU baby, but we understand families' worries and want to ease your concerns.

## Why shouldn't I be on the safe side and just use formula or donor milk?

Your milk has many protective substances that lower the chances your baby will develop health complications during and after the NICU stay. Donor milk does not provide this same protection and formula can actually increase the chances of health problems in your baby. **So, it is usually on the safe side to feed your milk instead of donor milk or formula!**

## What information does the NICU specialist use to determine that my milk is safe?

There are published guidelines about mothers' medications for full-term breastfeeding babies in the home. In the NICU, our specialists study this information and apply it to **your** baby and his/her specific condition. For example, when compared to full-term breastfeeding babies in the home, NICU babies are at greater risk for infections and other complications for which your milk is extremely protective. So, we use published guidelines as a starting point. Then we balance this information with your baby's needs for your milk and the fact that he or she is constantly monitored in the NICU, unlike babies in the home.

## The doctor who prescribed my medications said they are not safe with breastfeeding. This makes me very nervous.

This happens frequently, because most doctors who prescribe medications are experts in managing **your** health problems, but not in the care of NICU babies. **Mothers'** health care providers often advise about lactation using the medication company's guidelines, which may recommend not feeding your milk **to be on the safe side**. Our NICU specialists will talk to



your prescribing physician to explain why your milk is safe for your baby's feedings, so you don't feel caught in the middle of different doctors' opinions.

## Maybe I should just stop or change my medications if my milk is so important for my baby.

This is **never** a good idea. More than anything, your baby needs a healthy mother and you should continue your prescribed medications! Our NICU team will help you develop a plan that is best for both you and your baby, while you continue to take your prescribed medications.

## Are there other things I need to know about medications in my milk and my NICU baby?

Your milk is the most protective for your NICU baby during the first four weeks after birth, when NICU-related complications are the highest, and when high amounts of your milk lower the risk of these complications. **We try to feed only your milk during this time**. If we are concerned about your medications, we may recommend that your baby receive enough of your milk to lower the chance of complications and the rest of the feedings as donor milk. Rest assured that our NICU specialists will discuss their thoughts and recommendations with you, based on the very best research in this field so that you can make an informed decision.



## Disclaimer

This general information sheet is intended for use under the guidance of health professionals in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). It is primarily for training purposes and for additional information to be given to parents or private persons without medical education by NICU health professionals. The general information sheets provided by Rush University Medical Center are for parents and interested private persons without medical education and we do not raise any claim to completeness of the information sheets. Under no circumstances should this information be regarded as a substitute for professional advice or treatment or for any independent medical judgment of a healthcare professional regarding specific patient diagnoses or treatment plans. Healthcare providers should exercise their own independent medical judgment, and decisions as to any diagnosis or treatment plan are the sole responsibility of such healthcare provider. The general content of this information sheet cannot and shall not be used to make independent diagnoses or begin treatment. Our information is not personally related to you. We therefore recommend that you visit recognised healthcare professionals to get specific advice for any medical problems.

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We look forward to your inquiry at: [contact@lactahub.org](mailto:contact@lactahub.org)