



The Benefits of Breast Milk for premature babies

You may not have decided yet how to feed, but if your baby is delivered prematurely you will be encouraged to express milk for them very soon after delivery. Whilst this can be overwhelming and the last thing you want to do, the midwives, nurses and feeding specialists will be on hand to talk to you and help you with expressing, storing and delivering your breast milk to your baby. This leaflet is designed to share some of the science behind the benefits of breast milk for preterm babies.

Evidence suggests that for babies who are born prematurely, their mother's breast milk is the most important and effective intervention available for their nutrition.

As well as helping to protect premature babies' gut, breast milk also helps their brain, immune system, eyes and lungs.

For premature babies, breast milk is associated with improved development as the baby grows up (development includes skills like walking, coordination, speech).



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Every drop counts

Each Millilitre of maternal breast milk has a positive influence on outcomes for premature babies.

Your breast milk will be specifically designed for your baby in terms of nutrition, gut health and immunity.

All babies, no matter how early or unwell, can receive small amounts of colostrum (special early breast milk) into their mouth.



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Although you may have delivered early, your body will still be able to make breast milk, but your breasts will need the stimulation of regular expressing to start breast milk production.

Timing of expressing:

- Antenatal Expressing: Only if advised by the Midwifery or Obstetric team, **expressing antenatally (before delivery)**, either by hand or using the special 'Premature Breast Pump', encourages your breasts to have milk available at birth. This would mean your breast milk can be one of the first (and most important) treatments your baby receives.
- Evidence shows that if you can **express within the first 1 – 2 hours after delivery**, your milk volumes will be over double by 7 days (compared to if you wait until later than 2 hours after delivery), and this difference continues until at least 4 weeks.

Frequency of expressing:

- Aim for **8 to 10 times in every 24 hours**, Staff can help with both hand expressing and using the pump.
- Although exhausting, **night time expressing** is important as this is when the hormone receptors are most ready to



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stimulate milk production, so you may need to set an alarm.

- It may seem frustrating when very little milk comes out initially, but this stimulation will be important to get breast milk production established. **Every drop of breast milk makes a difference to your baby.**

Increasing Breast Milk Supply:

Sometimes, despite regular expressing, milk supply can start to fall. Feel free to talk to us about this, but there are also things we recommended you do to help increase your breast milk supply:

- Increasing the amount of contact and skin to skin you have with your baby (Staff will support you with this).
- Expressing near your baby, thinking about your baby, and looking at photos of your baby while you express.
- Exchanging a muslin cloth or item of clothing with your baby that has been near you. They will be comforted by your smell and you can touch and smell something that your baby has been close to when you are expressing.
- Looking after yourself by drinking plenty so that you stay hydrated, eating well and getting rest when you can.
- Increasing the frequency of expressing attempts: try hand expressing and using the pump.
- Checking you have a good fit with the pump. There are different size shields available and you can ask one of the staff to help you check you have the right one.



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Donor Breast Milk

For premature, or very low birth weight babies, giving formula can increase the risk of a serious gut complication (NEC, Necrotising EnteroColitis), as well as eye and lung problems. Although the risk is low, in our special care baby unit, and at others in the South West Neonatal Network, we can offer Donor Breast Milk for premature babies if required. Often this is an interim measure to support your baby whilst your milk volumes are increasing. Donor Breast Milk is pasteurised and obtained from our neonatal network Breast Milk Bank.

Please see our other leaflets on '**Donor Breast Milk**' and '**Expressing your milk**' for practical advice about expressing techniques and milk storage.

If you require further support with feeding you can contact the Infant Feeding Specialists on gwh.infantfeedingmidwives@nhs.net



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From 1st January 2019 smoking will not be permitted on any NHS site in England. Smoking will not be permitted within any of our buildings or anywhere outside on our sites. Smoking facilities will not be provided. Please be considerate of others when vaping in hospital grounds.

This information sheet is available to order in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 01793 604031 or email gwh.pals@nhs.net

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