

The Value of Mother's Milk in the NICU

Every drop counts

Mother's milk is not only for nutrition, it is like a special medication for infants. Providing this milk is the most helpful thing a mother can do for her infant in the NICU and following discharge.

A mother's milk is specifically designed for her baby. Mothers of our NICU patients are highly encouraged to express colostrum and breast milk for as long as possible to provide for her baby. This is something that *only she* can do for her infant. We will provide support to pump early (within the first 2-6 hours following delivery) and frequently (8-10 times each day) throughout the NICU stay. If desired and when baby is ready, the nurses and lactation consultants will give guidance and support to put baby to breast for feedings. If bottle feeding is preferred to provide mother's milk, our nurses will help to make it a safe and enjoyable experience for both Mom and baby.

Protective Benefits

- Colostrum (early breast milk) is packed with factors that promote intestinal development and reduce the infant's infection risk. The earlier the infant is born, the higher the concentration of these components.
- Many different fats in mother's milk optimize brain growth and development in the preterm infant who missed crucial growth occurring in the last trimester.
- While touching or holding her infant, a mother starts to make specific antibodies against germs in her infant's surroundings. Infants then receive these protective antibodies through their mother's milk.
- Fresh mother's milk contains thousands to millions of live cells. Among these are specialized cells for fighting infection and those that may act as an internal building and repair system.

Improving Outcomes

- Mother's milk enhances brain development beyond the NICU stay. Infants receiving full feedings of mother's milk generally have an increased IQ and improvement in behavioral scores when tested at the age of 18 months.
- Compared to formula, mother's milk reduces the risk of infection, SIDS, and many other diseases in the first year of life. It is also shown to protect and help with intestinal health and growth.
- Preterm infants fed mother's milk vs. formula are more likely to be discharged earlier and have a reduced risk of re-hospitalization within the first year after discharge.
- Mother's milk reduces the risk of disease over a lifetime. This includes childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes later in life. It has been shown to improve overall brain development as well.

We want to help to you to provide your baby with the lifelong benefits of an exclusive mother's milk diet while in the NICU and long after you have taken your baby home.