



# Your Breastfeeding Journey: A Guide to Human Milk Sharing

A low milk supply or the inability to make breast milk should not hold you back from giving your baby human milk.

## Formal Milk Sharing

Formal human milk sharing happens through Human Milk Banks. The milk has been pasteurized and tested for diseases and is generally used for sick or premature infants. Families with healthy children can sometimes purchase donor milk from a milk bank with a prescription. However, supply is very limited and insurance does not cover it.

## Informal Milk Sharing

Informal milk sharing is when families practice cross-nursing and babies receive human milk from people who are not their parents or co-nursing when both parents participate, either directly from the breast or by pumping and bottle-feeding. Informal milk sharing does come with risk as there is no way of telling whether the shared milk is safe.

## Tips to Consider:

- Do not buy human milk from anyone other than a milk bank. Milk bought online can be diluted with cow or rice milk as well as possibly contaminated with bacteria or other harmful chemicals.
- Informally shared milk is not pasteurized or tested. It is usually donated from mothers who have stored extra milk in their freezer and are willing to help those in need. **It is up to the parents to determine the safety of the donors through careful screening.**

## Questions to Ask a Potential Donor:

### Collection of milk

- Date of the milk, age of their infant or child
- Frequency of washing and sterilizing pump parts
- How fast milk was refrigerated/frozen
  - Milk should always be transported on ice

### Donor health

- Any medical conditions or recent illness/infections
- Any medications, supplements or herbs taken
- Recreational drugs or alcohol use
- Cigarette or marijuana exposure in the home
- Willing to share results of prenatal labs (HIV, Hepatitis B and C)
- Any rashes on breasts or nipples (Herpes, Impetigo, etc.)
- Any recent travel
- Any tattoos since delivery, due to risk of Hepatitis or HIV transmission

**Remember**, the key to informal milk sharing is open communication, between the donor and the recipient. If you are going to informally share milk, choose a donor you trust and feel comfortable with.

## Bringing Expressed Breast Milk to the Hospital:

- Be sure that the milk is labeled with your name and the date and time it was pumped.
- Frozen milk should remain frozen and go immediately into the breast milk freezer at the hospital.
- Thawed breast milk needs to remain on ice and go into the breastmilk refrigerator at the hospital as soon as possible. Thawed milk must be used within 24 hours.
- Breast milk may remain in the refrigerator up to 4 days and should be used prior to this expiration date. Once thawed it may not be refrozen.
- Left over frozen breast milk can be taken home and may remain frozen for up to 6 months.

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