

There are many health benefits to breastfeeding your baby, and breastfeeding is strongly recommended by healthcare professionals. However, in some special situations, there may be unique challenges to breastfeeding your baby. As parents, you may look for alternative sources to mother's own milk to feed your baby.

The safest alternative to mother's own milk is pasteurized donor milk from a regulated human milk bank. These milk banks take steps to screen milk donors, and safely collect, process, handle, test, and store the milk. At this time, breast milk acquired by the IWK from a regulated human milk bank is restricted to those babies who are considered most vulnerable, such as preterm infants in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

Talk with a Healthcare Provider First

The choice to feed your baby human milk from a source other than the baby's mother should always be discussed with your baby's healthcare provider. The nutritional needs of each baby are different and depend on many factors. It is important to discuss all nutritional options for your baby with a healthcare provider to make an informed decision. If you choose to use breast milk from another source you need to be aware of any potential risks to your baby. Healthcare providers can help you to make an informed decision, and can discuss information on the risks and benefits of all infant feeding options, including the use of donor milk.

Consider the Possible Safety Risks

If you are considering feeding your baby with human milk from a source other than the baby's mother, you should know that there are possible health and safety risks for the baby. When human milk is obtained directly from individuals or through the Internet, the donor may not have been screened for infectious diseases or any other contamination risks. It is also possible that the milk may not have been collected and stored in a way that reduces safety risks to the baby.

Potential risks for the baby include:

- Exposure to infectious diseases from viruses or bacteria present in the breast milk such as HIV, Hepatitis B or C, and human T-lymphotropic virus. There have been no reported cases of a baby getting HIV from a single feeding of another mother's breast milk. However, babies can get HIV through breast milk after many feedings.
- Exposure to chemical contaminants, such as tobacco, alcohol, and/or illegal drugs.
- Exposure to a limited number of prescription and/or nonprescription drugs that might be in the human milk, including herbal supplements.
- If human milk is not collected, handled and stored properly, it could, like any type of milk, become contaminated with bacteria that make it unsafe to drink (e.g. listeria, staph aureus).
- The milk may also contain cow's milk or soy milk. Studies have shown that some breast milk purchased from the internet has been diluted with cow's milk or soy milk.



Breast Milk Sharing-Information Sheet for Families

Making an Informed Decision to Feed your Baby with Breast Milk from a Known Source

If you choose to obtain milk from someone you know personally (e.g. sister) it is important for both parties to discuss with a healthcare provider how proper testing can be done on the breast milk donor before any milk exchange begins, and how the donor can take steps to maintain the safety of the breast milk produced and donated over time. It is recommended that donors be screened by a healthcare provider for HIV, human T-lymphotrophic virus, Hepatitis B and C prior to any breast milk donation.

Making an Informed Decision to Feed your Baby with Breast Milk from an Unknown Source

If after talking with your baby's healthcare provider, you decide to feed your baby with human milk obtained from an unknown, unscreened source (e.g. breast milk that has been purchased online) please ensure your healthcare provider is aware as there may be additional steps that will be required for storage and handling of the milk during your baby's care in the hospital. Please discuss this with your healthcare provider.