

Human Milk Donation for the Bereaved Mother

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- Human milk should be available to all ill and premature infants. Human milk offers the best health care outcomes and reduces health care costs. Donor milk should always be distributed equitably and in an altruistic manner. Milk banks support and promote breastfeeding as the optimal feeding method and work to educate the community on its benefits.
- The components within human milk work as medicine in addition to nutrition for vulnerable, premature infants. Donor milk is the next best option when mother is not available and empowers mothers to continue their own breastfeeding journey. Donor milk should never be viewed as a replacement to breastfeeding.
- Every potential donor faces a rigorous screening process to see if they are eligible to donate, including a blood draw that screens for five infectious diseases. The screening process is in place to ensure that donated human milk is safe for the most fragile babies. In addition, donated human milk undergoes nutritional analysis to ensure 19-20 calories/ounce. All milk is pasteurized for safety and any milk that does not pass the microbiology culture test will be discarded. Even after pasteurization, human milk still contains IgG antibodies and oligosaccharides, which are not found in infant formula.
- Milk donation plays an important role in the bereaved mother's grieving process. Bereaved mothers often want to recognize and honor their babies' lives and human milk donation is one way to do this. Lactation after a loss must be addressed and not ignored: lactation completes the reproductive cycle and can help mothers heal. Most bereaved mothers have a physiological need to pump and it releases prolactin, which can help reduce the symptoms of depression and work through their grief.
- It's important for breastfeeding professionals to address lactation management options, provide education, and include information for donating human milk to bereaved mothers. Remember that all mothers grieve differently and not all will want to donate human milk but it should be offered to them as an option.

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