NHS
Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Could you become a breast milk donor?

This leaflet is for anyone considering donating breast milk to the Oxford Human Milk Bank. This leaflet with tell you about donor breast milk, the screening process that takes place before being accepted as a donor and the practical aspects involved in being a donor.

What is donor breast milk?

Donor milk is another mother's breast milk, donated free by mothers who have surplus breast milk to give to another baby.

Why do some babies require donor breast milk?

Sometimes mothers are unable to feed their new baby straight away. This may be due to the mother being unwell or being unable to produce enough breast milk for her baby for medical or surgical reasons or because of a delay in her own milk production. Some mothers with premature or very sick babies may feel stressed and worried, which can make it difficult to produce enough milk at first. Others may have early feeding challenges and need to supplement feeds, donor milk can help bridge the gap in the first few days, (avoiding the use of formula) until she is able to feed her baby herself.

Is donated breast milk safe?

You would need to be registered at Oxford's Human Milk Bank, and have undergone lifestyle checks and screening tests at recruitment. The breast milk is tested for bacteria and pasteurised to 62.5 degrees Celsius for added protection. United Kingdom Association for Milk Banking (UKAMB) guidelines recommend that all donor milk is heat treated. Oxford Human Milk Bank has strict criteria; therefore, only milk that falls into this category may be given to babies.

What screening takes place?

You would need to be screened for the following:

- **Lifestyle:** this is to ensure you do not:
  - Smoke or vape, use nicotine patches or illegal drugs or are exposed to high levels of passive smoke
  - Drink more than 1-2 units of alcohol once or twice per week
  - Drink a large volume of drinks containing caffeine per day
- **Previous medical history:** Oxford Human Milk Bank checks that you do not have:
  - A chronic or acute medical condition that requires certain medication
  - A family history of TB
  - A history of having received growth hormones
  - At increased risk of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD)

❖ **Infections**

Although you are screened during pregnancy for HIV, Hepatitis B and Syphilis, to be compliant with other human milk banks around the UK and the NICE guidelines, Oxford Human Milk Bank now requires, with your consent, a post-natal blood test for the following conditions. The results must all be negative, before they can accept you as a donor.

You will be tested for:

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
- Hepatitis B and C
- Human T Cell Lymphotropic Virus (HTLV)
- Syphilis

HIV is a virus which causes Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), the name given to a collection of diseases which develop because the immune system breaks down. It is possible to carry the virus for many years without becoming ill.

Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver cells and can cause inflammation of the liver.

Hepatitis C is also a virus that infects the liver but shows no symptoms until significant damage is done.

HTLV is from a family of retroviruses that are known to cause cancer in the white blood cells called T-cell leukaemia/lymphoma.

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted bacterial infection.

Negative results will show that you are free from these viruses and infections at the time of registration.

Information about Covid related queries can be found here http://www.ukamb.org/covid-19-donors-precautions-response-may-2020/

Could you be a breast milk donor?

It is recommended that you establish your own baby's feeding before donating your milk. Most donors decide within the first few months that they would like to donate their surplus milk to the Milk Bank. The supply and demand nature of how breastmilk production works will ensure that you can still produce plenty of milk for your own baby.

How is milk collected?

All donors to Milk Bank need to have access to their own breast pump. The Milk Bank Manager is able to supply sterile bottles, labels, luggage tags, freezer thermometer (if needed) and instructions. Each bottle needs to be clearly labelled with the donor's name and the date the milk was expressed, and put into a freezer. When a 'batch' of milk is ready to be collected, the donor puts it into a clean plastic bag. This should be tied and a luggage label attached with a sticker, identifying the donor. Any medication taken should also be added to the label, they then contact the Milk Bank Manager who organises a collection. The amount of milk collected from each donor varies from woman to woman. The Milk Bank are also able to accept 'one off' donations as every drop really does count. Premature babies will often start with less than 20mls of milk per day.

When and how often would I need to express?

You would be encouraged to get into a routine and express around the same time each day. Breast milk is made on demand - increasing the amount of breast milk that is removed from your breasts will make your body increase the amount of breastmilk produced. If you are not routinely expressing, then increasing the number of times you express will encourage your body to produce more breast milk. This additional breast milk can be donated as it will be over and above what your own baby needs. Some prefer to express from one breast while their baby is feeding from the other.

What extra precautions would I need to take before expressing?

All milk sent to the Milk Bank must be tested for acceptable levels of germs. We all carry germs on our skin but babies who are born ill or prematurely cannot cope with germs as well as full term babies can. You are asked to pay particular attention to hand washing when collecting your breast milk so that as few germs as possible enter the milk you collect. The most common reason for having to 'reject' donated milk is the level of germs being too high before pasteurisation, so sterile bottles are provided to use.

- If you do not have a daily bath or shower, wash your breasts with soap and water once a day before expressing.
- Sterilise any equipment before expressing. Ways of sterilising equipment include cold water sterilising solution, steam sterilising or boiling.
- Wash your hands before expressing or taking expressing equipment out of the container.

How would I store the milk?

You would pour your collected milk into a sterilised bottle and put it into the fridge straight away. You can add to a bottle throughout the day and then at the end of a 24 hour period you'd place the bottle in the freezer – remembering that frozen milk expands so always leave a space at the top of the bottle. All milk then remains frozen during storage at home.

Expressed milk for donation can be stored before transport to the milk bank for up to 3 months in a domestic freezer at -18 degrees Celsius or lower.

All donors are asked to fill in a freezer temperature sheet every day. A thermometer is provided if needed.

You are not committing yourself to donating any particular amount or for any length of time.

When and how is my milk collected?

Once you have a batch of frozen milk, you contact the Milk Bank to arrange a collection from your home at your convenience.

What if I am unwell?

All donors are asked to notify the Milk Bank if their health or circumstances change or if breast infections develop. Any medication will need discussing with them as it may be necessary to suspend or stop breast milk donation.

Can I drink alcohol?

Yes, but in moderation. Please avoid drinking more than 1-2 units once or twice a week. Please leave as much time as possible between consumption and expressing.

Contact information

Please contact the Infant Feeding Team at the Royal Berkshire Hospital if you have any further questions.
Telephone number: 0118 322 8314
Email: infantfeedingteam@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

To register as a donor please contact:
Amanda Wood, Milk Bank Manager, Oxford University Hospital.
Email: Amanda.wood@ouh.nhs.uk or log onto www.ouh.nhs.uk/infantfeeding to download a registration form.

Information in this leaflet was obtained from Oxford University Hospital Milk Bank, UKAMB and NICE clinical guidelines 2012.
www.UKAMB.org
https://www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/CG93

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Infant Feeding Lead MW, April 2015
Reviewed: February 2025
Next review due: February 2027