

## Patient information factsheet

# Donating breast milk after a baby dies

We are so sorry for your loss. We understand that this is an incredibly sad and difficult time. Please know we are here to support you.

This factsheet contains information about donating breast milk after the death of your baby. We understand that deciding what to do with your breast milk can be an emotional and difficult decision.

This factsheet explains how donated breast milk is used and what the breast milk donation process involves. We hope it helps you to make an informed decision. It is important to note that there is no right or wrong way to feel, and no right or wrong decision, only what feels right for you. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact our Southampton milk bank team using the details at the end of this factsheet.

### What is a milk bank?

A milk bank is a service that collects, screens, stores and dispenses human breast milk to premature, sick and vulnerable babies.

In Southampton, we have a milk bank based at Princess Anne Hospital. Our milk bank accepts breast milk donations from across Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset. The breast milk donated to our milk bank is usually given to babies being cared for on neonatal units across the south of the UK. It is also sometimes used in research to help us learn more about the amazing properties of breast milk and improve future care.

### Why is donated breast milk so important?

Donor breast milk is widely used and is a highly recommended alternative to formula milk for premature and vulnerable babies when their parent's milk is not available due to illness or while establishing their own milk supply. This is because breast milk is more easily digested than formula milk and it helps protect premature babies from infection.

We are deeply grateful that you have chosen to think of others during such a difficult and personal time. If you choose to donate, we hope it brings you some comfort to know that your precious milk donation will make a meaningful difference in the lives of vulnerable babies and their families.

### Can anyone donate breast milk?

All donor breast milk must meet certain criteria before it is deemed safe and accepted by our milk bank. To ensure the safety of the donated breast milk, we will carry out screening checks, including:

- asking you questions about your health and any medications you are taking
- performing a blood test to check for certain viruses

Sometimes, due to a variety of reasons, we may not be able to give your expressed breast milk to babies on the neonatal unit. Please note that this does not mean that there is something wrong with your breast milk. In these circumstances, we will talk with you about other ways your breast milk can be used to support babies, such as donating it for use in research.

## What happens next?

If you are interested in donating your breast milk, you can contact our milk bank team directly or your nurse or midwife can contact us on your behalf.

When we speak to you, we will start by explaining how breast milk donation works and what the process involves. We understand you might have lots of questions about this and need time to think things through or talk with loved ones. It is important that you take time to think about donating your breast milk to ensure you make a decision that is right for you and your family.

Our milk bank team and neonatal family care team are here to support you and your family throughout the entire donation process to ensure everything is as smooth and stress-free as possible. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask us.

## Health and medication screening questions

If you wish to proceed with donating your breast milk, we will ask you some screening questions about your health and any medications you might be taking. Depending on the information you provide, we may not be able to accept your breast milk donation. However, if you would still like for your breast milk to help others, you may be able to donate it to the Milk Bank at Chester, who will use your donation for research. If you would like more information about this, please ask us. Alternatively, please see the 'Useful links' section on page 3 for more information about the Milk Bank at Chester.

## Blood test

The next stage of the donation process involves having a blood test. This blood test checks for the following viruses:

- human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) types 1 and 2
- human T-lymphotropic virus (HTLV) types 1 and 2
- hepatitis
- syphilis

If you are still in hospital, we can arrange for you to have this blood test done before you go home. If you have already gone home, we will send you a blood test form in the post with instructions on how to arrange this.

When we have completed all the necessary screening checks, we will contact you about your results. If everything meets our donation criteria, we will organise for your breast milk to be transferred to our milk bank at Princess Anne Hospital. If your breast milk donation is not already at Princess Anne Hospital, we will contact you to arrange a convenient time to collect this from you at home.

We will then pasteurise (a special treatment that uses heat to remove bacteria) your donated breast milk before freezing it and storing it safely in a freezer until it is needed.

## How much breast milk can I donate?

You can make a one-off breast milk donation of a supply you already have or, if you choose to continue expressing, you can continue to donate over time.

The minimum amount of breast milk needed to be able to pasteurise and donate it to babies on the neonatal ward is 60ml. If your donation is less than 60ml (between 10 and 59ml), you have the option to donate your breast milk to the Milk Bank at Chester for research. We will discuss this with you in more detail, if applicable.

After the death of a baby, some people choose to continue expressing breast milk. For some, this can be a source of comfort and a meaningful way to honour their baby. However, this is a very personal decision, and it may not feel right for everyone. We encourage you to talk with the medical team or the infant feeding team supporting you. They can help you explore your options and make a choice that feels right for you and your circumstances.

Please note that if you would like to continue expressing and donating your breast milk, a minimum of 2 litres is needed per collection from your house. We will discuss this process with you in more detail if you are considering this option.

## Memory Milk Pebble

The Memory Milk Gift Initiative was created in 2021 to raise awareness of donation after loss as a choice for families.

If you are able to donate your breast milk, either for research or use as donor milk, we will ask you if you would like to receive a wooden Memory Milk Pebble. This is a wooden pebble with your baby's name painted on it to remember their precious gift to others.

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Southampton milk bank team

Telephone: **023 8120 6009** (Monday and Wednesday, 7.30am to 5pm and Thursday, 7am to 3pm)

Mobile: **07795 506279** (every day, 7.30am to 3.30pm)

Email: [Milkbank@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:Milkbank@uhs.nhs.uk)

Neonatal family care team

Telephone: **07827 271166** (Monday to Friday)

Email: [Neonatafamilycare@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:Neonatafamilycare@uhs.nhs.uk)

## Useful links

### The Milk Bank at Chester

The largest NHS milk bank in England.

Website: [www.milkbankatchester.org.uk/research-and-development](http://www.milkbankatchester.org.uk/research-and-development)

### Southampton milk bank

Website: [www.uhs.nhs.uk/for-visitors/southampton-childrens-hospital/childrens-services/neonatal-intensive-care-unit/milk-bank](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/for-visitors/southampton-childrens-hospital/childrens-services/neonatal-intensive-care-unit/milk-bank)

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## UHS

Bereavement support after the death of a baby on the neonatal unit

[www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Bereavement-support-after-the-death-of-a-baby-on-the-neonatal-unit-3275-PIL.pdf](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Neonatal/Bereavement-support-after-the-death-of-a-baby-on-the-neonatal-unit-3275-PIL.pdf)

## Sands

A pregnancy and baby loss charity that provides support to anyone affected by pregnancy loss or the death of a baby.

Website: [www.sands.org.uk](http://www.sands.org.uk)

## SERV Wessex – The Blood Runners

A volunteer service that supports the Southampton milk bank by collecting and delivering breast milk donations across Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset.

Website: <https://servwessex.org.uk>

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **PFSH@uhs.nhs.uk**

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **[www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport)**

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