

Supplementing

Some families may need to supplement their breastfed baby for medical reasons, while others may choose to supplement for personal reasons.

What is supplementing?

Giving your baby your own expressed milk, donated human milk or baby formula, in addition to breastfeeding.

Supplementing Options

Recommended supplements in order of what to try first, if available:

1st choice: Your own milk, freshly hand-expressed or pumped

2nd choice: Your own frozen milk, thawed just before using

3rd choice: Pasteurized donor milk from a certified human milk bank

4th choice: Store-bought infant formula that is cow's milk-based (see [Formula Feeding](#))

Your own milk is best

Your own milk – fresh or frozen (when fresh isn't available) – is the best way to feed your baby.

If you need to give your baby something other than your own milk

Option 1 – Pasteurized donor human milk from a certified human milk bank

Because certified milk banks have a small supply of milk, it's usually only given by prescription to premature, very ill or high-risk babies.

What is pasteurized donor human milk?

Human milk that has been donated to a certified human milk bank. Donors are carefully screened to make sure they're healthy and their milk is safe. The milk is pasteurized to kill harmful bacteria and viruses.



BE AWARE

To help ensure your baby grows well and stays healthy, always follow the directions on the label when making and storing formula.

Option 2 – Store-bought infant formula

If you're not able to get milk from a certified human milk bank, the next best choice is cow's milk-based store-bought infant formula. This can provide your baby with complete nutrition. Formula is available in 3 types: ready-to-feed liquid, concentrated liquid and powdered.

If your baby is less than 2 months old and was born at 37 weeks or earlier, or if she weighed less than 2,500 grams at birth,

use liquid formula – either ready-to-feed or concentrate. Powdered formula isn't sterile and can make your baby sick. Specialized formulas should only be used if recommended by your health care provider.

Before Supplementing

Talk with your health care provider before giving your baby anything other than your own milk. This will help you get all the information you need to feed her safely.

Supplementing with other milk or formula when it's not needed can decrease your milk supply, cause engorgement (see [Breastfeeding Challenges You May Face](#)) and make breastfeeding more difficult. It can also affect your baby's health.

But sometimes it's medically necessary to supplement to give your baby more food and energy. The most important thing is that your baby gets enough food and that she's fed safely – whether with human milk, formula or both. Talk with your health care provider if you have concerns about giving your baby formula.

If you supplement:

- Give your baby as much of your own milk as you can.
- Get support from your health care provider or a lactation consultant to keep up your own milk supply. This may allow you to return fully to breastfeeding in the future.
- Use a spoon or a small cup without a lid, not a bottle. Or use a specialized feeding device if recommended by your health care professional.



KEY TAKEAWAY

If you're thinking about supplementing, make sure you have all the information you need to make an informed decision. Talk it over with your health care provider or public health nurse, or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 for advice.

Donating your extra milk to the BC Women's Provincial Milk Bank

If you have extra milk you would like to donate, talk with your doctor or midwife, visit bcwomensmilkbank.ca or call 604-875-3743.

What About Sharing Milk Informally With Other Parents?

What is informal ("peer-to-peer") human milk sharing?

Sharing unscreened, unpasteurized human milk with friends, family members, or through local or online milk-sharing groups.

Parents who want to give their baby human milk but aren't able to produce enough themselves sometimes consider informal milk sharing. But before giving your baby milk from an informal donor, talk with your health care provider about the risks and benefits.



BE AWARE

Health Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society and the Human Milk Banking Association of North America do not recommend sharing human milk with friends, family or milk-sharing groups. Milk shared informally is not tested or pasteurized to kill harmful bacteria and viruses.

What are the risks?

Because milk shared informally isn't screened or pasteurized, it may carry risks:

- Viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis B and C can be passed to your baby. Donors may not even know that they carry certain viruses and bacteria.
- If donors smoke or drink alcohol or if they take prescription or over-the-counter medications, herbal supplements or street drugs, harmful substances can pass into the milk and hurt your baby (see [Caffeine, Smoking, Alcohol, Drugs and Breastfeeding](#)).
- If the milk isn't collected and stored safely, bacteria can grow and make your baby sick.
- Unscreened donor milk may be mixed with water, cow's milk, or something else that you don't know about.

Lowering the risks

If you're considering informal milk sharing, lower the risk by:

- not buying milk online
- finding out all you can about your donor's health and lifestyle
- only using the milk of a close family member or friend
- limiting the number of donors you use
- having ongoing, face-to-face contact with your donor
- asking your health care provider what kinds of tests your donor should have, and asking your donor to share their test results with your health care provider
- ensuring that the milk is handled, stored and sent to you as safely as possible
- learning how to safely store and reheat human milk (see [Expressing Your Milk](#))



DID YOU KNOW

In-home heat treatment of human milk ("flash heating") has not been proven to remove dangerous bacteria and viruses that could make your baby sick.

For more information on informal milk sharing, see perinatalservicesbc.ca/Documents/Guidelines-Standards/HealthPromotion/InformalMilkSharing_FamilyInfo.pdf.