# Human Milk Fortifiers (HMF)

*What you need to know*

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*This handout explains what human milk fortifiers (HMFs) are and how they help premature or sick babies grow. It describes how HMFs are added to pumped human milk to give extra nutrients babies may have missed by being born early. You'll also learn how HMFs are safely used in hospitals, what to know about recent news stories, and how they can be part of a feeding plan that supports breastfeeding.*

***Scan for a digital copy of this handout.***

## What are human milk fortifiers?

Human milk fortifiers (HMF) are special supplements (add-ins) that are often made from cow's milk, like baby formula. HMF has extra nutrients like protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals (such as calcium).

Babies who are *premature* (born early) don't have as much time to grow in the womb. HMF gives them the important nutrients they missed so they can keep growing the way they would have If they were still in the womb.

Even though HMF is made from cow's milk, the proteins are changed to make them easier for babies to digest. Hospitals have safely used cow's milk-based HMF for many years.

## How does HMF work with human milk?

Human milk, or breast milk, is the best food for babies. But when babies are born early, they often need more nutrients to help them grow. That's why healthcare providers sometimes add HMF to the milk.

If the baby's parent doesn't have enough milk, pasteurized donor milk (milk from another person) can be used. Donor milk may not have enough calories for a premature baby, so it's even more important to add HMF.

Adding HMF turns regular milk into a "shake" even more full of nutrients that will help your baby grow. This helps babies get as much human milk as possible, which will support their health both in the hospital and after they go home.

## What about formula?

Sometimes we give formula to help breastfed or chestfed babies get extra nutrition, especially if they aren't premature anymore or no longer need HMF. Most formula is made from cow's milk, like HMF.

Formula is a safe and healthy way for many babies to get the nutrition they need, especially if parents cannot or choose not to use human milk. Formula is safe for babies who were full-term (born near their due date), or for premature babies who are close to their due date.


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## Can I still nurse my baby?

Yes. If your baby can nurse (breastfeed or chestfeed) and you would like to, you can still do that. HMF is usually added to pumped milk to give extra nutrition while your baby is growing in the hospital. Many babies nurse and get pumped milk with HMF during t heir time in the NICU or after going home.

As your baby gets stronger, they may not need HMF anymore, and you may be able to nurse more often. Your care team will help you make a plan that works best for you and your baby.

## HMF in the News

You may have heard news stories about lawsuits against companies that make cow's milk-based HMF, which is often used in hospitals. These lawsuits are about a serious intestinal (digestion) problem in premature babies called *necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC).*

Some people say that HMF causes NEC, but studies do **not** show this. There is **no** scientific proof that HMF causes NEC. In July 2024, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) shared a statement to help explain the facts. You can scan the QR code on the right to read the full message.

The AAP explained that:

- NEC is a complicated condition, and scientists are still learning about it.
- Human milk may lower the risk of NEC, but it doesn't fully prevent it.
- HMF and other formulas are an important part of feeding and caring for premature babies.
- Feeding decisions should be made by families and doctors together, based on what each baby needs and the type of milk available.

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk with your care team. We are here to help you make the best choices for your baby.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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