

Mouth care with mother's milk

Why is mother's milk important?

A mother's breast milk is the best source of nutrition for their baby. It is also like medicine for them. This is especially true for babies who begin their lives in the hospital.

Breast milk helps to:

- Protect from infection and promote healing. This can shorten a baby's hospital stay.
- Promote stomach, intestine and brain development.
- Improve developmental outcomes later in life. This can include better performance in school and higher IQ scores.
- Meet the baby's changing needs. A mother's breast milk changes every day to meet these needs.

What is mouth care with mother's milk?

Your baby may not be able to breastfeed, or even eat at all. Mouth care with your breast milk helps make sure your baby still receives your milk's important benefits.

Mouth care with your breast milk is also important for:

- Getting your baby ready to breastfeed.
- Calming your baby, especially during painful procedures.

The care team already does mouth care to help prevent infection and to keep your baby's mouth and gums healthy. Using breast milk helps even more. It gets absorbed through the mouth and into the body, even though they do not swallow it.

Which milk should I use?

Use your colostrum for mouth care first. Colostrum:

- Is the thicker, yellowish milk made in the first few days after a baby is born.
- Has high amounts of antibodies (to help fight infection), nutrients and other important substances the baby needs in their first days of life.

After the first few days of life:

- Use fresh breast milk. This is preferred.
- If you do not have fresh milk, use thawed breast milk (thawed in the warmer).

Keep a small amount of freshly pumped breast milk for mouth care. The care team can:

- Provide syringes to hold the milk.
- Place this "mouth care milk" in the refrigerator for 4 days or you can keep it at your baby's bedside for up to 4 hours.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Mouth care with mother's milk, continued

Only a mother's own milk may be used for mouth care. Donor breast milk should not be used for mouth care.

How do I do mouth care with mother's milk?

Ask your baby's care team to help when you first start doing mouth care with your breast milk. Then follow these guidelines:

- Do mouth care with your breast milk at least 1 time each day.
 - You can do it up to 6 times a day if you would like.
 - If you are pumping at your baby's bedside, do mouth care every 2 to 3 hours, right after pumping.
- To do mouth care with your breast milk:
 - Put a small amount of warm or room temperature breast milk into a medicine cup or other small container.
 - With a sterile cotton swab, gently paint the inside of your baby's mouth with your milk. The care team will provide swabs.
 - Focus on coating your baby's tongue, gums and the inside of their cheeks.
 - Do mouth care slowly. Follow your baby's developmental cues.
- If your baby uses a pacifier, you may put a small amount of your breast milk on it. Breast milk "pacifier dips" are a great way to decrease pain and stress during procedures.

Talk with your baby's care team if you have questions about breast milk or mouth care.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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