

Initiative Encourages Breastfeeding Preemies

Delivering a baby prematurely can throw a wrench into the best-laid plans. Instead of the peaceful scene you imagined, the birth may become a whirl of medical staff with your tiny baby at its center. If the baby has any problems, he or she may be whisked away to the nursery or a neonatal intensive care unit.

The experience can leave a mother feeling sad, frustrated and useless. She may wonder if there's anything she can do for her baby that all those nurses and doctors can't.

The answer is "yes." A mother has a unique gift only she can give her preemie: human breast milk.

"For the most fragile infants, breast milk is 'liquid gold,'" says Mark E. Anderson,

M.D., a board-certified neonatal-perinatal specialist with Regional Neonatal Associates in Knoxville. "Breast milk helps infants to fend off infection and provides nutritious ingredients that can reduce the infant's stay in the neonatal intensive care unit. It is the best medicine mothers can give their babies."

Nurses and doctors at Mercy Medical Center St. Mary's are participating in a state-wide initiative to provide their tiniest patients with human breast milk.

The Human Breast Milk Project is part of the Tennessee Initiative for Perinatal Quality Care (TIPQC). The Level IIB Special Care Nursery at Mercy St. Mary's is championing the effort to make providing breast milk to critically ill infants a priority.

According to Dr. Anderson, breast milk offers irrefutable and long-lasting health benefits for newborns—but especially for preemies. "Breast milk provides antibodies that can help babies fight off diseases and infections. Preemies are at a higher risk for infection because of their immature immune systems. Since premature babies can get very sick from RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) and other common illnesses, this is an important benefit," he explains.

Studies show that premature babies digest breast milk better than they digest formula. "Breastfed preemies get off of IVs more quickly, get out of the hospital faster, experience fewer vision problems and have higher IQs. Formula is associated with increased risk of ear infections, asthma and allergies, skin disorders and digestive problems," says Marla Peak, RN, BSN, clinical leader of the Special Care Nursery.

"I've always believed that breast milk is a precious gift only a mother can give her child. I would have felt helpless if I didn't do this for my son."

—Christina See, Mercy St. Mary's patient

"Even if mothers will not be breastfeeding after their babies go home, we encourage them to provide breast milk while they are in the Special Care Nursery," Peak says.

"Although mothers of preemies may feel helpless, breastfeeding is something they can do to help their babies. It offers benefits to the baby that all the high-tech equipment and the doctors and nurses simply can't provide."

Breast pumps are available in the Special Care Nursery and milk is marked and conveniently stored for future feedings. Breast pumps are covered by most insurance plans and there are community resources available for the uninsured.

Dr. Anderson says breastfeeding rates for preemies in Mercy's Special Care Nursery are now 60 percent and growing, thanks to the initiative to encourage breastfeeding preemies. "There are very few contraindications for breastfeeding, including some medications and medical conditions. Less than one percent of women shouldn't breastfeed.

"Talk with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about breastfeeding," he says.



Christina See of Halls says choosing to breastfeed her baby in the Special Care Nursery at Mercy St. Mary's was an easy decision, and she thanks the unit's staff for their encouragement and support. "I've always believed that breast milk is a precious gift only a mother can give her child. I would have felt helpless if I didn't do this for my son." Braxton was born prematurely on March 28 and spent 11 days in the Level IIB Special Care Nursery.

2-for-1 Deal

Whether a baby is born early or on time, breastfeeding provides moms and babies with many health benefits.

Benefits for You

The extra calories that breastfeeding burns can help moms return to their pre-pregnancy weight sooner, and the hormones that breastfeeding produces help the uterus return to its previous size more quickly. Breastfeeding may also reduce a mom's risk of breast and ovarian cancers, as well as diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

Benefits for Baby

Breastfed babies have fewer illnesses due to the mother's antibodies in human milk. Human milk promotes the growth of "good bacteria" in the newborn's intestine. Sucking at the breast promotes good jaw development and encourages the growth of strong, healthy teeth. Breastfeeding offers a sense of security and warmth from the nursing mother.

For helpful tips on breastfeeding, visit www.mercy.com.

Q&A With Emily F. Evitt, M.D.

Board-Certified Obstetrician/Gynecologist
ISIS Women's Care

Q. I just found out I'm pregnant. I am so excited... and a little scared! What can I do to ensure a healthy, safe pregnancy?

A. Congratulations! Finding out you're pregnant can be happy and scary at the same time. One of the first things you should do is find an obstetrician you feel comfortable with.



A relaxed and friendly relationship with a board-certified obstetrician/gynecologist is the most valuable tool for any woman. Prenatal visits will give your doctor a chance to check that everything is going smoothly and to answer all your questions. She can guide you step by step through your pregnancy and make sure your delivery is a memorable and beautiful birth.

Here are 10 tips for a healthy pregnancy:

1. Take a prenatal vitamin each day, as directed by your doctor.
2. Take 400 micrograms of folic acid daily to prevent spinal and brain birth defects.
3. Drink plenty of fluids—at least eight to 10 glasses a day—avoiding caffeine.
4. Follow a low-fat, high-fiber diet, broken into several small meals a day to help prevent nausea.
5. Don't smoke or drink. Both can cause birth defects.
6. Exercise to improve circulation, mood and energy.
7. Get adequate sleep. Sleep on your side to reduce pressure on your back from belly weight.
8. Wear comfortable, non-restricting shoes and put your feet up several times a day to prevent swelling.
9. Use a seat belt correctly. Place the lap strap under your belly, and the chest strap off to the side of your belly and between your breasts.
10. Don't take over-the-counter medications without first consulting your doctor.

Enjoy this special time. You can feel wonderful during your pregnancy knowing you are taking steps to give your baby the best start.

Help Us Fight Heart Disease

Come to the Greater Knoxville Go Red for Women® Luncheon

Date: **Wednesday, May 4**
Time: **9 a.m. to 1 p.m.**
Place: **Knoxville Convention Center**



Call **865-212-6509** by Monday, May 2 to register for this special event. Cost is \$60 per person and includes breakout sessions, vendor booths, a silent auction and luncheon featuring inspirational speaker Barbara Dooley.

The Go Red for Women Luncheon will raise funds needed to fight the No. 1 killer of women—heart disease. As the Cause Sponsor for Go Red for Women in Knoxville, Mercy Health Partners encourages you to join our mission to support education and research that could save lives.

To learn more, visit www.GoRedForWomen.org.