Guidelines for collecting and storing breast milk for infants in the NICU

It isn’t unusual for twins, triplets or more to be born preterm (i.e. before 38 weeks) and as a result, have to spend days, weeks or even months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). For those families wishing to breastfeed, it is possible to do so by pumping and bringing in breast milk to the NICU to be fed to their babies. The gathering and storing of breastmilk can be confusing. To ensure the best quality milk for your babies, here are some recommended collecting and storage guidelines of breast milk. Remember that every drop counts and whatever amount is collected is the best thing for your infants and you can feel proud of your efforts. If you have any questions regarding your milk supply or how to conserve it, be sure to ask the NICU staff.

Storage and Sterilization

1. Purchase some bottles and labels to store the milk. The bottles need to be boiled and sterilized before each use. Bags are not appropriate for storing milk in the NICU.
2. Clearly label each bottle, including the babies’ names, date and time that the breast milk was collected.
3. Ideally prepare bottles of 1 ounce, 2 ounces or 4 ounces, if you can, for storage.
4. Do not overfill the bottles as breast milk expends when it is frozen.
5. Make sure all pump material is properly cleaned and sterilized between uses.
6. In an insulated cooler with ice packs, breast milk can be stored for one day.

Storage Times of Breast Milk for Preterm Infants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshly expressed milk</th>
<th>Room temperature 25C/77F</th>
<th>4 to 6 hours (if room is warm, use in 4 hours)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refrigerated milk</td>
<td>a)Refrigerator (fresh milk)</td>
<td>a)Up to 5 days, but 3 days is optimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Store at back of fridge, not in door)</td>
<td>b)Refrigerator (thawed milk)</td>
<td>b)24 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4C or 39F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen Milk</td>
<td>a)Freezer compartment inside refrigerator</td>
<td>a)NOT RECOMMENDED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Store at back of freezer, not in door. DO NOT REFREEZE)</td>
<td>b)Freezer compartment with separate door</td>
<td>b)3 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transporting Milk</td>
<td>c)Deep freezer, not attached to refrigerator</td>
<td>c)Up to 12 months, but 6 months is optimal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Fresh, refrigerated or frozen)</td>
<td>Packed in insulated cooler with ice or “blue ice”</td>
<td>24 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15C or 60F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transporting Breast Milk to NICU

Fresh breast milk can be refrigerated and transported to the NICU on ice or “blue ice” packs in a little insulated cooler. Once at the NICU, give your labelled breast milk to the nurse in charge of your babies to be placed in the refrigerator or freezer.

If you have any questions regarding these procedures or about breastfeeding in general, be sure to talk to the nurse in charge of your babies. Hospital staff will be most happy to answer your questions and help you at any point.

If you have any questions regarding pumping or storing your breast milk, do not hesitate to discuss them with the nurse or lactation consultant.

Your breast milk is important to your babies. Save ALL the milk that you pump.

References

*Information from Mayo Clinic – Breastmilk Storage Do’s and Don’ts


3) Riordan Jan, Breastfeeding and Human Lactation, 3rd edition. p.378-382

4) Pumping, Storing & Transporting Breast Milk for Infants in the NICU, Wexner Medical Center

5) Breastmilk: Pumping, Collecting, Storing – University of Rochester Medical Center

Additional Resources

Finding Our Way: Life with Triplets, Quadruplets and Quintuplets, Triplets, Quads & Quints Assoc., 2001


The Joy of Twins and Other Multiple Births, Pamela Patrick Novotny, Crown Trade Paperbacks, Inc., 1994


From Valerie Lavigne - Mom of three breastfed babies, including twins.

Adapted by Lynda P. Haddon - Multiple Birth Educator – www.jumelle.ca

Recommended Sources of Information:

La Leche League of Canada Referral Service
www.lalechelealgue.org

Lactation Consulting Services Canada

MBC Breastfeeding Peer Support Network