
INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS, PARENTS, GUARDIANS AND CARERS

Human milk fortifier



Introduction

This leaflet explains what human milk fortifier (HMF) is and why we recommend it for your baby. Please feel free to ask us any questions you have about the information below.

What is human milk fortifier (HMF)?

Human milk fortifier is nutritional supplement that can be added to expressed human milk either a mother/birthing parent's own breast/chest milk (EBM) or donor human milk (DBM). It comes as a powder in sachets, which is dissolved into bottles of EBM or DBM. It contains extra calories, protein and some essential vitamins and minerals, which help to promote growth and bone development while your baby is in the Neonatal Unit.

Why is HMF needed?

A mother/birthing parent's own breast/chest milk is the first choice of milk to feed for your baby. However, preterm (premature) babies and babies born with low birthweights may need more nutrients than term babies in order for them to grow optimally. Usually in the third trimester of pregnancy, around 31 weeks gestation, your baby would rapidly grow in the womb. When babies are born early, they miss out on this rapid growth; HMF helps to provide this extra nutrition, and is a temporary supplement to support your baby's growth. Your breast/chest milk is still the main component in their development. Eating or drinking particular food will not increase the nutritional content of your breast/chest milk. However, it is important to stay well-hydrated and also have prolonged periods of skin-to-skin contact with your baby, which helps to release a hormone called oxytocin and can help with your milk production.

When is HMF given?

In the early weeks your breast/chest milk provides most of the nourishment your baby needs (particularly protein), which supports your baby's growth and brain development. Over the first two to three weeks, the amount of protein in your breast/chest milk naturally decreases. In order to increase the protein content of your breast/chest milk, it may be necessary for the team looking after your baby to consider the addition of HMF.

What is HMF?

The main ingredient in HMF is protein, but it also contains vitamins, minerals, and trace elements, which mean other nutritional supplements can sometimes be stopped. The protein in HMF originally comes from cow's milk, but it has been broken down so it is easier for your baby to digest and is less likely to cause intolerances.

How is HMF given?

HMF will be prescribed by a doctor. It comes in sachets of powder and is mixed with fresh (or defrosted) breast/chest milk or human donor milk (DBM). Fortify a minimum amount of breast/chest milk as close as possible to baby's feed time; one sachet of HMF is added to 50 millilitres of milk but can be added to smaller volumes if needed. Gently shake or rotate the breast/chest milk gently to distribute the fortifier. Initially, when this is introduced, your baby will be observed to make sure your baby is tolerating HMF added to feeds. In most cases, HMF continues until baby is fully breast/chest fed, unless baby is gaining weight rapidly then it is stopped sooner.

What evidence do we have for and against HMF?

There is evidence to show that using HMF improves growth in the short term. There is also evidence to show that using HMF improves bone strength (known as bone density). There is no evidence that link HMF to increase risk of necrotising enterocolitis (NEC) or intolerance to feeds.

Are there any side effects?

You may notice that your baby's bowel habit changes, with stools looking slightly thicker.

Need more information?

If you have any questions about HMF, please let your baby's nurse know and a doctor or dietitian will arrange to meet with you.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service:

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references for this leaflet (if relevant) please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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