

# Breastfeeding Week

## Milk Banking - Supporting, Promoting Breastfeeding and Saving Lives

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What a wonderful start to life for the millions of infants all over the world whose mothers are able to offer them the perfect nutrition, protection and nurturing through the simple act of breastfeeding. By encouraging and assisting mothers to breastfeed we are helping to raise healthy babies and save lives and money. To emphasise the value of breastfeeding The World Health Organisation has set aside the first week of August as International Breastfeeding Week.

Sadly, mothers who are themselves very ill or unable to be with their babies, for a short or extended period, are often unable to supply their babies with this unique and precious commodity – breastmilk. For premature infants the availability or lack of breastmilk can literally make the difference between life and death. This puts premature infants whose mothers, for whatever reason, are unable to provide them with breastmilk at great risk of life threatening infections. The most common infection seen in premature infants when they do not receive breastmilk is Necrotising Enterocolitis (NEC). This preventable infection is the main reason for the existence of milk banks all over the world. The local Western Cape milk bank, Milk Matters owes its existence to the vision and foresight of the management at Mowbray Maternity Hospital, the largest maternity centre in the Western Cape.

Their shared vision of promoting and supporting breastfeeding has enabled Mowbray Maternity Hospital and Milk Matters to develop a unique provincial / NGO partnership that has proven to be of great benefit to local infants but more importantly to thousands of premature infants all over the Western Cape.

Milk Matters supplies pasteurised breastmilk to 23 hospitals in the Western Cape but their ultimate mission is to motivate hospitals to develop their own in-house milk banks, George Hospital being our beacon example. All that is needed is enthusiasm, commitment, some breastfeeding mothers and Milk Matters will provide you with the knowledge and experience gained over the last 8 years.

Milk banking is a community project in the truest sense of the word. It is an opportunity for state institutions, the private sector, professionals, communities, individuals and most importantly breastfeeding mothers to participate in making a huge difference to many, many tiny and vulnerable little human beings.

is Milk Banking is a concept that is not new to South Africa, in fact it has just celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Mowbray Maternity Hospital is home to a milk bank, Milk Matters that supplies donor breastmilk to babies around the Western Cape who are unable to receive their own mother's milk. Breastmilk is central to the health of all babies however premature infants are hugely vulnerable and at risk of infections as a result breastmilk at all costs is given to these infants. The superior nutritional and immunological properties of breastmilk help these babies to recover and grow more quickly and also prevent potentially life-threatening infections. Research has confirmed that the risk of Necrotising Enterocolitis increases when an infant is given formula as opposed to breastmilk.....add to this

Mowbray Maternity Hospital is fortunate to have a Kangaroo Mother Care Ward which is the backbone to the holistic care given to the infants. The KMC unit also acts as a reservoir for our breastmilk donors. Some of these mothers and infants spend months in the unit awaiting the growth of their infants as a result can potentially donate litres of breastmilk. For a mother to donate she must complete a simple lifestyle questionnaire and have a negative HIV and Hepatitis B result. Donating breastmilk is something that most lactating mothers are able to do however are just not well-informed about the concept of donating their extra breastmilk. At times Mowbray Maternity Hospital has been self-sufficient in terms of screened mothers donating their extra breastmilk to other premature infants without access to their own mothers milk.

Donor breastmilk not only contributes to the lives of premature infants without access to their own mother's milk but it also promotes and supports breastfeeding as a result contributing to Millennium Development Goals 4, 5 and 6. On World Breastfeeding Week huge emphasis is placed on how breastfeeding promotes the future well-being of society.

Dr Alan Horn of Groote Schuur describes milk banking; 'It is potentially life-saving and is worth more than equipment or staff. Together with KMC, it is an intervention that most doctors themselves cannot give, but most mothers can - it completes medical care.'

'The term Milk "Bank" is perfect - it simultaneously describes the safety and the value of donated milk.'