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## Breastfeeding premature infants

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Lactation is a part of the reproductive cycle of all mammals, including humans. Breast milk has not only nutritional properties but is also a component of the immunological system and is almost more important for preterm than term healthy infants. Breastfeeding has both short- and long-term outcome benefits for premature infants, including a reduction of the rate of Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC). The mechanism underlying the effect of breast feeding in NEC is normal microbial colonization of the gut. Furthermore, human breast milk could be protective and therapeutic in neonates with NEC by inhibiting the activation pathway of NF-kappaB. Although mothers of preterm infants produce milk with different composition from that of mothers of term born infants, this milk may still not be adequate for the proper growth of preterm infants. Breast milk may need fortification. Both when fortification is required and when it is not, mother's breast milk is the first choice for feeding premature infants according to the WHO. The second choice is milk from a milk bank. The goal for mothers of small preterm babies in neonatal intensive care units should be to produce the highest amount of their own milk. The truth is that although some mothers can produce the correct amount, the majority cannot. Procedures that can increase the amount of breast milk and breastfeeding rates include kangaroo care, finger feeding, nonnutritive sucking and special devices. Certain positions may also help. Best practices are important for high-dose human milk feeding for preterm infants during Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) hospitalization. Finally, special care must be given to babies 34-37 weeks, as they may not need complicated intervention but do need skin to skin contact and attention.

## Biography

Panagioula Bourna is working as the Director NHS of Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pediatric Department, Attikon University Hospital, Athens, Greece. She is a Neonatologist since 1987 with special interest in Ultrasound and Doppler examination of newborns. She also is an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant since 2006. She is working exclusively with newborn babies in the nursery and in Intensive Care Unit. She is a Member of Greek Breastfeeding Committee, one of the two coordinators of BFHI in Greece and a BFH Assessor.

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