



UNCNCG

Center for
Women's Health
and Wellness

**13th Breastfeeding and Feminism
International Conference**

**March 21st – 23rd, 2018
Sheraton Hotel, Chapel Hill, NC, USA**

CAROLINA
GLOBAL
BREASTFEEDING
INSTITUTE

**USING HUMAN MILK FOR ARTWORK & FOOD:
IS IT ETHICALLY ACCEPTABLE?**

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Introduction

- Breastfeeding confers benefits on both child and mother for the short-term and long-term and is a key to newborn and child survival intervention.
- The WHO and UNICEF recommend the initiation of breastfeeding within an hour after birth, exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life, and continued breast-feeding throughout the second year of life or beyond
- In addition, there are several alternate practices of using human milk

Human milk for other purposes

1. Human milk is used for adults with various medical conditions, e.g. for:
 - treating such as radiotherapy and chemotherapy¹
 - treating IgA deficiency after liver transplantation patients (and liver regeneration)²
 - curing certain 40 types of cancer (HAMLET)³
2. Human milk is used for art and foods/beverages, e.g.:
 1. ice cream, cheese, soap, jewelry....

1. Overs SE, Freeman RA, Zarshenas N, Walton KL, Jorgensen JO. Food tolerance and gastrointestinal quality of life following three bariatric procedures: adjustable gastric banding, Roux-en-Y gastric bypass and sleeve gastrectomy. *ObesSurg.* 2012;22(4):536-43.

2. Merhav HJ, Wright HI, Miele LA, Van Thiel DH. Treatment of IgA deficiency in liver transplant recipients with human breast milk. *Transplant Int.* 1995;8:327-9.

3. Pettersson J, Mossberg AK, Svanborg C. alpha-Lactalbumin species variation, HAMLET formation, and tumor cell death. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun.* 2006;345(1):260-70.

For example:

1. “Baby Gaga” ice cream first appeared for public sale in 2011 in London, then appeared again in 2015 as “Royal Baby Gaga” ice cream with profits donated to a breastfeeding charity.
2. In 2010, a New York-based chef, Daniel Angerer, served human cheese in his restaurant.
3. In 2011, Miriam Simun, a New York-based interdisciplinary artist, made human cheese as an art project.
4. In 2017, Natasha Tontey, an Indonesian artist, has also used human milk as one of her artworks.
5. Moreover, some women turn human milk into jewelries and soaps

Case Study:

Human Milk for Artwork in Indonesia by Natasha Tontey

- Used as an artwork: “Fresh Flesh Feast” –a dinner exhibition, a conversation about cannibalism
- Created wide protests through social media and a breastfeeding mom group
- The artist was reported to the police, sued, and judged by the society as doing an unethical art exhibition

Things to consider..

- Using human milk for other purposes can also be considered **insensitive** to the fact that many mothers lack breastfeeding support
- There is a critical need to support mothers to breastfeed their babies -in a setting where many mothers do not receive appropriate breastfeeding information and education-
- Thus, a contemporary approach (such as artworks) in supporting mothers to breastfeed can help mothers and increase the society's awareness of the importance of breastfeeding

To conclude:

- It is imperative **to prioritize** the primary function of human milk as the most appropriate food for infants and young children;
- To get a consent from the milk donors;
- To appropriately screen the milk to prevent any possible health risks to those who consume the products

Thoughts to discuss...

- Buying human milk from unknown donors (randomly), no consent for using it for artwork?
- Using human milk for an art project or foods could help promote breastfeeding

References

1. Merhav HJ, Wright HI, Miele LA, Van Thiel DH. Treatment of IgA deficiency in liver transplant recipients with human breast milk. *Transplant Int.* 1995;8:327- 9.
2. Overs SE, Freeman RA, Zarshenas N, Walton KL, Jorgensen JO. Food tolerance and gastrointestinal quality of life following three bariatric procedures: adjustable gastric banding, Roux-en-Y gastric bypass and sleeve gastrectomy. *ObesSurg.* 2012;22(4):536-43.
3. Pettersson J, Mossberg AK, Svanborg C. alpha-Lactalbumin species variation, HAMLET formation, and tumor cell death. *Biochem Biophys Res Commun.* 2006;345(1):260-70.
4. World Health Organization/UNICEF. (2003). *Global strategy for infant and young child feeding.* Geneva: WHO.