

“It’s Not About the Milk”

Can Using Donor Milk Help to Heal a Mother’s Pain?

by Johanna Sargeant

- Many women feel that using donor milk will help heal their pain at being unable to exclusively breastfeed
- Many health professionals feel that giving women access to donor milk will heal their pain.
- Much of the support for mothers stops when they access donor milk, as the problem is now ‘fixed’.

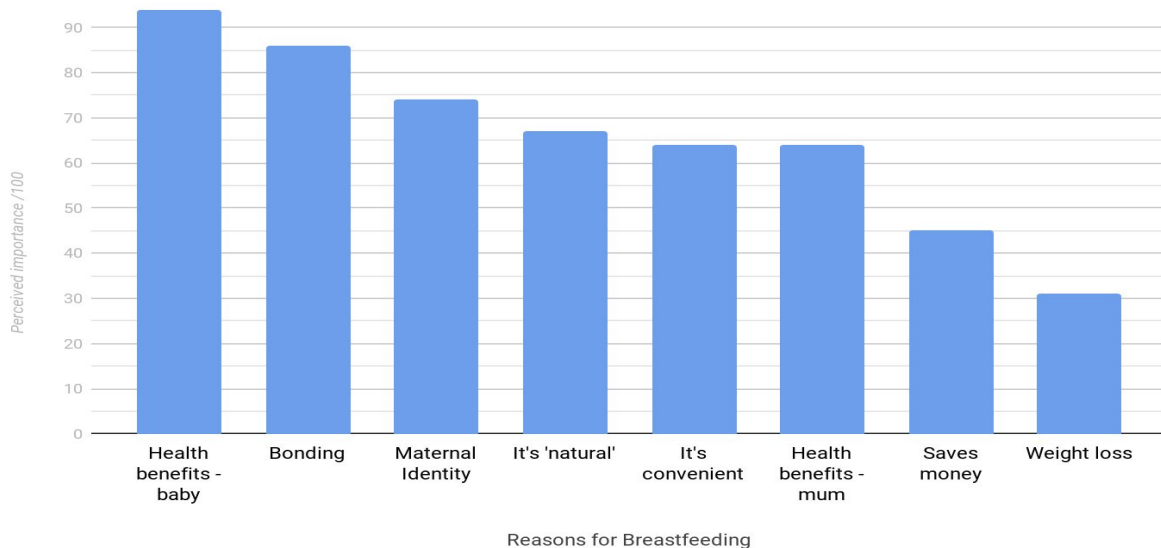


But it’s not about the milk.

"I was and am so very grateful to my (breastmilk) donor... But I don't think I will ever fully forgive myself for the way that I failed my child. That is something I will always grieve and a failure I will carry with me forever."

A survey of 1042 breastfeeding women:

Why Do You Breastfeed?



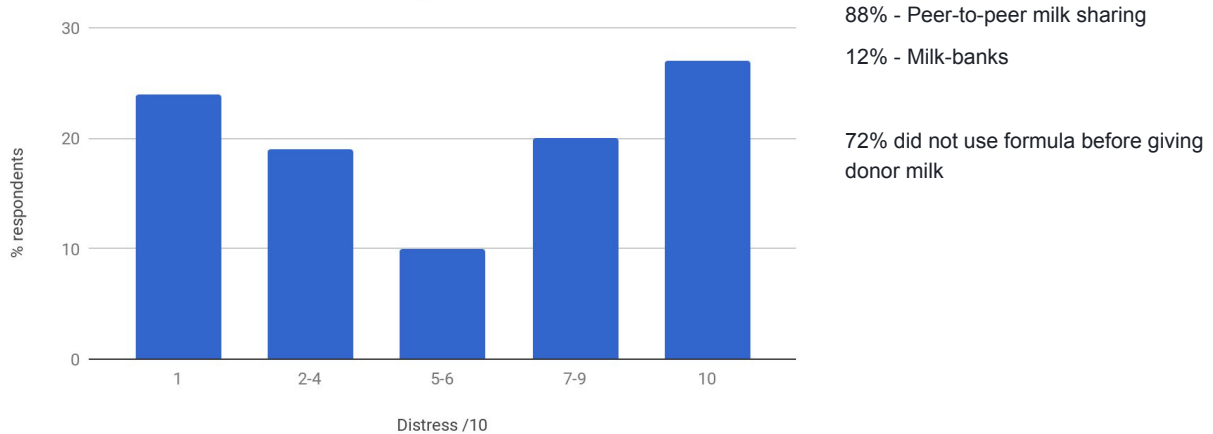
Other Reasons:

- ‘To feel like a proper mum who is capable of breastfeeding.’
- ‘To make up for my failure to bring my twins to term.’
- ‘Not wanting to be seen as a ‘bad mother’ or not trying hard enough.’
- ‘To make up for the fears and doubts I had in my pregnancy, which my baby would have also felt.’
- ‘I want people to see me as a good mum.’

- 'I want to feel like a proper mother.'

**166 Donor Milk Recipients were asked,
"How did you feel about needing to give additional milk?"**

Distress levels in Donor Milk Recipients



Did Donor Milk Heal a Mother's Extreme Distress?

When looking at respondents who rated a 7 or higher:

- 😊 ~40% felt **'happy'** or 'glad' that their baby was now thriving on the best nutrition.
- 😐 ~30% Reported **no difference** in their feelings.
- 😞 ~30% Revealed that their **pain was magnified** in the presence of an over-producer.

What are the implications?

- Foster breastfeeding *relationships*, irrespective of milk supply. At-breast-supplementation.
- Ensure continued postpartum support for mothers, even if we feel they are 'fixed'.
- Look to breastfeeding promotion -- acknowledge *all* forms of breastfeeding??



"This is not what we planned. This is not what we wanted. And I tried every single thing in my power to make breastfeeding work. I promise... but it didn't work, and that was beyond devastating and traumatic for my whole family. The decisions I made were never made lightly, and the depression is real. I will always be a failure. So please don't say that people who search for donor milk are taking advantage or taking the easy way. It was one of the hardest things I've ever done."