

## **Human Milk is the Only Milk for Extremely Premature Infants**

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Significant benefits to infant host defense, sensory-neural development, gastrointestinal maturation, and nutritional status are observed when premature infants are fed their mothers' own milk. A reduction in infection-related morbidity in human milk-fed premature infants has been reported in nearly a dozen descriptive, and a few quasi-randomized, studies in the past 25 years. Most notably is the significant reduction in necrotizing enterocolitis associated with the receipt of a human milk diet, and even more of a reduction with an exclusive human milk diet. Numerous components in human milk have been tested and each exerts a protective effect in models of necrotizing enterocolitis. Human milk-fed premature infants also have decreased rates of re-hospitalization for illness after discharge. Studies on neurodevelopmental outcomes have reported significantly positive effects for human milk intake in the neonatal period and long-term mental and motor development, intelligence quotient, and visual acuity through adolescence. Body composition in adolescence also is associated with human milk intake in the NICU. Lastly, human milk intake is less associated with the development of the metabolic syndrome than infant formula feeding.