

Ryan's Story

Thriving Through the Gift of Donor Milk

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Gary and Crystal Chevalier live in Billings, Montana with their 15 children—10 who are adopted.



1 month old

Ryan, the youngest member of the family, was born 8 weeks early with a hypoxic brain injury caused by oxygen deprivation at birth. Now, at 22 months, Ryan receives a shipment of frozen pasteurized donor milk every 10 days from Mothers' Milk Bank of North Texas.

Ryan's twin, Zac, is robust and healthy. However, Ryan began life as a medically fragile baby and spent his first five months in the hospital. For his first 18 months, he had pneumonia every 4 to 6 weeks. Because of his brain injury, his body can't regulate autonomic processes such as swallowing. Therefore, he is continuously fed through a gastrostomy tube and breathes through a tracheostomy tube. Ryan's medical obstacles also include spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, auditory neuropathy, vision difficulties and a very sensitive GI tract.

A close family member, who also happens to be a previous milk donor, suggested Crystal approach Ryan's doctor about his eligibility for donor milk. Ryan's medical challenges and his intolerance to formulas and other foods warranted the need for the immunological properties of breastmilk.

After connecting with Mothers' Milk Bank of North Texas for donor milk, Ryan's weight increased and his overall health continues to improve. While Ryan may not ever be able to do all of the things other children his age do, his parents are thrilled that he has learned to roll over and hold his head up, and most of all, that he recognizes and interacts with each person in his family.



22 months old

A Note from Ryan's Mother

We feel an immense amount of gratitude for donor mothers, their selfless gift of donor milk and time. We don't know what Ryan's health would be like without it. In many ways, we feel like the milk has saved his life ... or at the very least saved his heart from extra strain and his intestinal tract from things he doesn't tolerate. Donor mothers have also provided Ryan with something that, as an adoptive mother, I wasn't able to give him. The increased immunity to infections alone makes breastmilk a life-saving gift for Ryan. Thank you for giving him what I couldn't. – Crystal Chevalier