



## Feeding your baby formula Before you start

Human milk (breast milk) is the only food your baby needs for the first 6 months of life. After 6 months continue to offer human milk, along with solid foods, until your child is two years of age or older.

Parents may give their baby infant formula for a variety of reasons. Store-bought infant formula made from cow's milk is recommended for most formula fed babies. Offer infant formula until your baby is 9 to 12 months of age.

Soy-based infant formulas are only recommended for babies with a medical condition called galactosemia (g-lak-toh-see-me-ah) or for babies who do not drink dairy for religious or cultural reasons.

Do not feed home-made infant formula, cow's milk or other animal milk to your baby. They are not safe and do not give your baby the complete nutrition they need to grow and develop.

If you have questions or concerns about feeding your baby, contact your health care provider, a public health nurse or a lactation consultant. You can also call HealthLink BC at **8-1-1** to speak with a registered nurse or registered dietitian.

### What are the different types of infant formula?

There are 3 types of store-bought formula: ready-to-feed, liquid concentrate and powdered. Ready-to-feed and liquid concentrate are sterile (free from germs) until they are opened. Powdered formula is not sterile.

You can buy infant formula at most grocery stores and pharmacies. Follow the instructions on the label. Do not dilute the formula with extra water. Never use formula from a container with dents, bulges or other damage. Use the formula before the expiration date on the package.

### What type of formula can I offer?

Healthy babies born at full term, which is 37 weeks or more of pregnancy, can be fed any type of store-bought formula: ready-to-feed, liquid concentrate or powdered. If you use powdered formula, prepare it carefully. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #69b Feeding your baby formula: Safely making and storing formula](#).

Some babies have a higher risk of getting sick from powdered infant formula and should be fed ready-to-feed or liquid concentrate formula. These babies include those who:

- Were born premature, before 37 weeks of pregnancy, and are under 2 months of age (corrected age)
- Weighed less than 2500 grams at birth and are under 2 months of age
- Have a weakened immune system, meaning they are more likely to get sick if exposed to germs

If you are not sure what type of formula to feed your baby, discuss with your health care provider.

### What do I need to make formula?

You will need the following items to make formula and feed it to your baby:

- Bottles, rings, nipples, discs, caps
- Tongs, spoons, mixing utensils, can opener (if needed)
- Digital thermometer (for powdered formula)
- Large pot with a lid or a kettle for boiling water
- Safe drinking water (for liquid concentrate and powdered formula)

If you do not have a safe source of drinking water, use ready-to-feed formula. You can also make store-bought liquid concentrate or powdered formulas with bottled water that has an unopened seal. If you are

not sure if your water is safe, check with your local public health unit.

### **How do I clean and disinfect the bottles and equipment to make formula?**

Wash bottles thoroughly with soap and water. Then, disinfect the bottles and equipment used to make formula. To learn how to wash and disinfect, see [HealthLinkBC File #69b Feeding your baby formula: Safely making and storing formula.](#)

Artificial nipples wear down over time. Throw away nipples that are cracked, sticky or torn. New disposable bottle liners are sterile and ready to use. Use a new liner for every feed.

### **How do I bottle feed my baby?**

- Cuddle or hold your baby close. Your baby's head should be higher than their body. Support your baby's head to make it easier for them to swallow
- Let your baby decide how much they would like to drink. Do not rush them or force them to finish the bottle
- Hold the bottle so most of the nipple is in the baby's mouth
- Tilt the bottle just a little, keeping it almost flat. It's easier for your baby to manage the flow of formula. Some air in the nipple will not cause a problem for your baby
- Gently burp your baby after feeding. If they have a lot of gas, burping your baby half-way through feeding may help
- Do not prop the bottle or put your baby to bed with a bottle. Your baby may drink too much or too little and it can cause choking, ear infections and tooth decay (cavities). For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #19 Dental care for your infant and toddler](#)
- Your baby might try to hold the bottle but will not be able to feed themselves until later in their first year. When your baby can feed themselves, try offering the formula in a cup

### **How often should I feed my baby?**

Most babies feed at least 8 times in 24 hours in the first few months of life. Time may vary between feeds. It is normal for babies to feed during the night. Your baby may drink different amounts at each feed and

this can change from day to day. It is important to watch for your baby's signs of hunger and fullness.

Feed your baby when you notice early signs of hunger. Your baby will show you they are hungry by doing any of these things:

- Bringing their hands to their mouth
- Opening their mouth, yawning or making lip smacking sounds
- Turning their head toward the person holding them, often with their mouth open (called rooting)
- Making fists over their chest or belly

### **How much should I feed my baby?**

Every baby is different. In the first few days your baby's stomach is quite small. Your baby may only need small amounts of formula at each feeding. As they grow, they may drink more at each feeding and go longer between feedings.

Let your baby decide how much they want to eat at each feed. Your baby will show you they are full by doing any of these things:

- Closing their mouth
- Slowing down or stop sucking
- Turning their head away from the bottle or the person feeding them
- Showing lack of interest in feeding
- Falling asleep

Stop feeding when your baby shows you they are full. Your baby may still have small sucking movements after a feed. This is normal baby behavior.

Once you start feeding, use the bottle within 2 hours. Throw out any leftover formula. Do not reheat formula during a feed or refrigerate a partly used bottle.

Your baby is getting enough formula if they are growing well and have 6 or more wet diapers a day by the time they are one week of age. If you are concerned your baby is not feeding enough, contact your health care provider.

### **For more information**

To learn more about infant feeding see:

- [Baby's Best Chance](#)