

**A guide  
to infant formula  
for parents  
who are  
bottle feeding**

## Introduction

This booklet is designed to help parents who are not breastfeeding decide which infant formula to use to feed their baby.

There is a separate *Bottle feeding* leaflet by the Department of Health on how to sterilise equipment and make up a feed. If you don't have it, ask your midwife for a copy.

If you are bottle feeding you should be shown how to sterilise equipment, make up and give a feed before you leave hospital. If you haven't been shown – *ask*. Even if you think you know, check with a midwife or health visitor as some advice may have changed.

## What is infant formula?

Most infant formulas are made from cow's milk which has been processed to make it suitable for babies.

There are several brands of infant formula with different company names. There is no evidence that one company's milk is better for your baby than any other. If you think that one company's milk disagrees with your baby, try another company's milk and speak to your midwife or health visitor.

There are also different types of milk e.g. first milk, second milk, follow-on milk, etc. You need to be very careful about which type of milk you use as this could affect your baby's health. Always read the labels very carefully.

## What types of infant formula are there?

### First milks

These milks are often described as for newborns. They are based on the whey of cow's milk and are more easily digested than the other milks. Unless your doctor or health visitor suggests otherwise, this is the best type of infant formula for your baby.

If bottle-feeding, first milk is the only food your baby needs for the first six months. After six months continue to give first milk as you start to introduce solid food. When your baby is one year old, ordinary (full-fat) cow's milk can be given.

### Second milks

These are often described as for 'hungrier babies'. There is no evidence that babies settle better or sleep longer if given these milks. They are based on the curd of cow's milk and take your baby longer to digest than first milks. They are not recommended for young babies.

### Follow-on milks

Follow-on milks are described as suitable for babies from six months of age. It is not necessary to move your baby on to these milks.

Follow-on milks should never be used for babies under six months old as they are not nutritionally suitable. However, the labels can look very similar to first milks so read them carefully.

## Goodnight milks

Goodnight milks are advertised as suitable for babies from six months to three years of age. They contain follow-on milk and cereal.

These milks should never be given to babies under six months old as they are not nutritionally suitable. They are not necessary for any baby and there is no independent evidence to support the claim that they help babies settle or that they are easy to digest.

## Soya formula

Soya formula is made from soya, not cow's milk. Soya formula contains high levels of a chemical called phytoestrogen which may have negative effects on babies and so should only be used in exceptional circumstances and only under the recommendation of a doctor.

## Goat's milk-based infant formula

Do not give your baby goat's milk-based infant formula, as this is not approved for use for babies less than one year under UK regulations.

## Ordinary cow's milk

Do not give your baby ordinary cow's milk as a drink until he is one year old, as it is not nutritionally suitable until then.

## How often should I feed my baby?

You should feed your baby as much as he wants, as often as he asks, provided he is not regurgitating significant amounts. If he is regurgitating significant amounts this may mean that he wants smaller amounts – but more often – than the ‘guide’ section on the tin or packet suggests.

Newborn babies may take quite small volumes to start with, but by the end of the first week of life most babies will ask for approximately 150–200ml per kg per day – although this will vary from baby to baby – until they are six months old.

**Avoid overfeeding.** Giving lots of milk in one feed will not necessarily enable your baby to go longer between feeds. It is just as likely to make him be sick, or put on too much weight. Don't try and make him finish the bottle if he doesn't seem to want it.

## How do I know if my baby is hungry?

You will soon learn to recognise signs of hunger in your baby. If you can spot these before he is crying for food, he will be easier to feed.

- When he wakes up he will start to move about. This would be a good time to start preparing the feed.
- He will then begin to move his head and mouth around.
- Finally he will find something to suck, usually his fingers. This would be a good time to offer your baby some milk.

## How do I know if my baby is getting enough milk?

Your baby's weight gain and what is in the nappy will tell you whether he is getting enough to eat.

- Your baby will be producing at least six wet nappies a day after the first day or so. These should be soaked through with clear or pale yellow urine.
- For the first few days after birth your baby will pass dark sticky stools (meconium). After the first week your baby should pass pale yellow or yellowish-brown stools. Bottle-fed babies will need to pass stools at least once a day to feel comfortable.
- Your health visitor will weigh your baby at 8, 12, 16 weeks and at 1 year and plot on a chart. She will discuss the findings with you.

## What if my baby seems constipated?

Often this can be resolved with closer attention to the way in which the feed is made up, or possibly by changing brands. Ask your health visitor for advice.

## What about bottles and teats?

Teats can be made from rubber or silicone and vary in shape. There is no evidence that one teat is better than another. It is fine to try different teats and use the one that suits your baby best.

All feeding bottles are made of food-grade plastic. However, some shapes and patterns on bottles can make them difficult to clean. A simple, easy-to-clean bottle is probably best.

## How do I help my baby to feed from a bottle?

- Always hold your baby close to you and look into his eyes when feeding. This helps your baby feel safe and loved.
- Try to hold your baby fairly upright, with his head supported in a comfortable, neutral position.
- Hold the bottle horizontal to the ground, tilting it just enough to ensure your baby is taking milk, not air, through the teat. Babies feed in bursts of sucking with short pauses to rest. In this position, when your baby pauses for a rest the milk will stop flowing, allowing him to have a short rest before starting to suck again.
- Brush the teat against his lips and when he opens his mouth wide with his tongue down, help him draw the teat in.
- You will see bubbles in the bottle as your baby feeds. If you can't see any bubbles, break the suction between his tongue and the teat from time to time by moving the teat slightly to the side of his mouth. You should then see bubbles rushing back up into the remaining milk.
- Your baby may need short breaks during the feed; he may also need to burp sometimes.
- Interrupting the feed from time to time also gives your baby a chance to register how 'full' he is, and thus control his intake.

Your baby needs to be able to relate to those caring for him. Aim to keep the number of people who feed him as small as possible.

Your baby should always be held and never be left unattended while feeding from a bottle.

## What about winding?

If your baby shows signs of distress during the feed, encourage him to let go of the teat and sit him up, or put him over your shoulder, and see if he needs to burp. Continue feeding him when he seems more comfortable.

## When should I start giving other foods to my baby?

The recommended age for starting to offer your baby other foods is six months. All the nourishment your baby needs for the first six months is provided by first milks.

It is normal for your baby's feeding and sleeping patterns to alter as he grows and develops. This does not mean that you need to change the type of milk or introduce solid food.

Once you start introducing solid food, carry on offering your baby first milk as well as other foods until your baby is a year old. Babies can be encouraged to use cups when they start on solid food at around six months.

For further information please see the [Department of Health's \*Bottle feeding\* leaflet](#) and the [Birth to Five](#) book (click titles to download them).

**Breastfeeding is the healthiest way to feed your baby. If you decide not to breastfeed or to stop breastfeeding, it is possible to restart but it will be difficult. Giving infant formula to a breastfed baby will reduce your breastmilk supply.**

**You do not need to eat any special foods while breastfeeding, but it is a good idea for you, just like everyone else, to eat a healthy diet. It is recommended that all pregnant and breastfeeding women take a daily supplement of 10 mcg of Vitamin D.**