



Formula Feeding Your Baby Getting Started

Breast milk is the healthiest choice for babies, and most mothers can breastfeed. Before you decide to feed your baby formula, contact your public health nurse, community nutritionist, family doctor, or 8-1-1 to speak with a registered nurse or registered dietitian. Support is available to help you breastfeed your baby.

For babies who can not be breastfed, commercial infant formula is recommended.

Home-made formulas do not provide the balanced nutrition your baby needs and are not recommended.

Which formula should I choose?

The different types of formula are ready-to-feed, concentrated liquid, and powdered infant formula.

Choose a milk-based, iron-fortified infant formula, unless advised otherwise by your doctor or health care provider. Follow-up formulas are not needed for babies under 12 months.

Buy and use formula by the expiry date. Do not use formula from cans with dents, damage or bulging tops or bottoms.

How do I choose the right type of formula?

Healthy full term babies can have ready-to-feed, concentrated liquid, or powdered infant formula. If powdered infant formula is used, take special care when preparing it. Follow the formula preparation and storage instructions on the label. For more information, see [HealthLink BC File #69b Formula Feeding Your Baby: Safely Preparing and Storing Formula](#).

If your baby is at high risk, she should have ready-to-feed or concentrated liquid formula whenever this is available. If ready-to-feed or concentrated liquid formula is not available, then powdered infant formula can be used, taking special care to prepare it.

Babies considered high risk include:

- premature babies under 2 months of age (premature babies are born before 37 completed weeks of pregnancy),

- low birth weight babies who weighed less than 2500 grams at birth and are under 2 months of age, and
- babies of all ages who are immunocompromised or have weakened immune systems.

When it is correctly diluted, concentrated liquid formula and powdered infant formula are usually about the same price. Ready-to-feed formula is generally more expensive.

Ready-to-feed formula is recommended if you do not have a safe water source.

If you do not have a refrigerator, talk to your public health nurse or community nutritionist, or call 8-1-1 to speak with a registered dietitian about the type of formula to use.

What equipment do I need for formula feeding?

You will need bottles, caps, rings and artificial nipples and tongs. Talk with your public health nurse about which artificial nipple to choose.

If using powdered formula, you will also need a digital thermometer.

How do I clean bottles and equipment used to make formula?

Before washing bottles and equipment, wash your hands well with soap and warm water. Clean and disinfect kitchen counters using a solution of 5 mL (1 tsp) of household bleach to 740 mL (3 cups) of water, or use a kitchen sanitizer.

Wash bottles, artificial nipples, rings, caps and equipment for preparing formula, in hot soapy water. Use a long brush to scrub inside the bottles and nipples. Wash these by hand or in the dishwasher.

Boil all of the clean equipment including the container and mixing spoon in a clean, uncovered pot for 2 minutes. Household dishwashers do not sterilize. Boiling the equipment used to prepare formula removes germs that can cause diarrhea and vomiting.

Artificial nipples may become worn over time. Check nipples often and throw away any that are cracked, sticky, or torn.

Using tongs, remove bottle parts from the water and fit artificial nipples, caps, and rings together. Place the nipple on the inside of the bottle for storage.

If using a disposable bottle system, you will need to wash all the parts, and then boil the artificial nipples and caps. New liners are clean and ready to use.

Wipe clean the tops of cans and the blade of your can opener before opening formula cans.

How should I hold my baby while formula feeding?

Cuddle or hold your baby close while feeding. Hold your baby's head higher than her body and support her head to make swallowing easier.

Let your baby set the pace. Do not rush feeding. Hold the bottle so most of the artificial nipple is in your baby's mouth and the formula fills the nipple. This will prevent your baby from swallowing air.

Burp your baby after each feed. If your baby has a lot of gas, burp your baby part way through the feed.

Never prop the bottle in your baby's mouth. This could cause choking or tooth decay.

Although your baby may try to hold the bottle, she will not be able to feed herself until later in the first year. When she can feed herself, you can try offering formula in a cup.

How often should I feed my baby?

Feed your baby when she shows signs of hunger. Hunger cues or signs may include: bringing her hands to her mouth, sucking, rooting (turning her head toward the person holding her, often with her mouth open), irritability and crying.

In the first few months of life, babies usually feed every 2 to 3 hours or at least 8 times in 24 hours. It is normal for babies to feed during the night. Older babies usually feed less often.

Do not let your baby sip from a bottle of formula over long periods of time or at sleep times, as this can lead to tooth decay. For more information, see HealthLink BC File [#19 Dental Care for Your Infant and Toddler](#).

How much should I feed my baby?

Follow your baby's cues. Newborns may drink as little as 1 ounce (30 mL) at a feeding. Most babies drink about 2 to 4 ounces (60 to 120 mL) each feeding during the first month. Babies gradually have more until they are drinking about 6 to 8 ounces (180 to 240 mL) at a time.

Do not be too concerned about the amount of formula, and do not coax your baby to finish the bottle if she is not interested. Stop feeding when your baby shows signs of fullness.

Signs that your baby has had enough formula include: closing her mouth, turning away from the bottle, pushing away from the bottle or the person feeding, or falling asleep.

For more information on infant formula, see HealthLink BC File [#69b Formula Feeding Your Baby: Safely Preparing and Storing Formula](#) or see Health Canada's guidelines on [Preparing and Handling Infant Formula](#) at www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/kitchen-cuisine/pif-ppn-eng.php.

For more information, contact your local public health unit, health care provider, or call 8-1-1 to speak to a registered nurse or registered dietitian.

For more HealthLink BC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/index.stm or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.