



Feeding Your Baby Formula Before You Start

Breastmilk is the only food your baby needs for the first 6 months of life. When your baby starts solid foods, continue to offer breastmilk until your baby is 2 years and older.

Parents may give their baby infant formula for a variety of reasons. Some breastfed babies are also fed formula. If you are having trouble 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 formula can I offer?

Feed your baby a store-bought (commercial) infant formula made from cow's milk until they are 9 to 12 months old. 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.

You can buy infant formula at most grocery stores and pharmacies. Use the formula before the expiration date on the package. Never use formula from a container with dents, bulges or other damage.

Follow the directions on the label when making formula. Always wash your hands and work area thoroughly with soap and warm water before making formula.

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.

What are the different types of infant formula?

There are 3 types of 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.

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
- 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

Healthy babies born at full term, which is 37 weeks or more of pregnancy can be fed any type of store bought formula. If you use powdered formula, prepare it carefully. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #69b Feeding Your Baby Formula: Safely Making and Storing Formula](#). 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?

To make formula and feed it to your baby, you will need the following items:

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

If you do not have a safe source of drinking water, use ready-to-feed formula. You can also make liquid concentrate or powdered formula 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 my baby's bottles and equipment to make sure they are safe?

Wash bottles thoroughly. Then, disinfect the bottles and equipment used to make formula. Disinfect means to kill any germs that could make your baby sick. Dishwashers do not disinfect. To learn how to 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. Do not wash and re-use bottle liners.

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, tooth decay (cavities) and ear infections. 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.

If your baby has 5 or more wet diapers a day (4 to 6 days after birth) and is growing well, they are getting enough formula. If you are concerned your baby is not feeding enough, contact your health care provider.

For More Information

If you have any questions about feeding your baby, contact your local health unit or your health care provider. You can also call **8-1-1** to speak to a registered nurse or registered dietitian.

To learn more about infant formula, visit Health Canada – Infant formula www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/infant-care/infant-formula.html.