



Feeding Your Baby Formula Before You Start

Breastmilk is the only food your baby needs for the first 6 months of life. If you are having trouble breastfeeding your baby, contact your health care provider. You can also call HealthLink BC at **8-1-1** to speak with a registered nurse or registered dietitian.

If you cannot give breastmilk to your baby, feed your baby a store-bought (commercial) infant formula. Always follow the directions on the label when making the formula. If you don't, your baby may not grow well and could get sick.

Where do I get infant baby formula?

You can buy baby formula at most grocery stores and pharmacies. There are 3 types of formula: ready-to-feed; concentrated liquid; and powdered.

Always use the formula before the 'use by' or expiry date on the package. Never use formula from a container with dents, bulges, or other damage. Do not make your own baby formula. Home-made formulas are not safe for your baby and do not give your baby the complete nutrition they need to grow and develop.

What formula does my baby need?

Buy formula made from cow milk. Soy-based infant formula can be used if your baby has galactosemia (g-lak-toh-see-me-ah) or can't have formula made from cow milk for religious or cultural reasons. If you are not sure what formula to buy, talk to your health care provider.

Healthy full term babies

You can feed your baby ready-to-feed, concentrated liquid or powdered infant formula if your baby is healthy and born at full term, which is 37 weeks or more of pregnancy. If you use powdered formula, prepare it carefully. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #69b Feeding Your Baby Formula: Safely Making and Storing Formula](#).

High risk babies

Babies are called 'high risk' if:

- The baby is born before 37 weeks of pregnancy (premature) and is currently less than 2 months old.

- The baby weighed less than 2500 grams at birth and is currently less than 2 months old.
- The baby's immune system is weak, meaning they are more likely to get sick if exposed to germs.

If you are unsure if your baby is 'high risk' talk to your health care provider.

If your baby is a 'high risk' baby, and you are using formula, use either ready-to-feed or concentrated liquid formula. Only use powdered infant formula if you cannot get either type of liquid formula. Once your baby is older than 2 months, you can use powdered formula.

What do I need to feed my baby formula?

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

- Bottles
- Tongs
- Caps
- Spoons
- Rings
- Fridge
- Nipples
- Safe drinking water
- Digital thermometer (only for making powdered formula)
- Large pot with a lid
- Kettle for boiling water

If you do not have a safe source of drinking water, use ready-to-feed formula. 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 to make sure they are safe?

You must wash and sterilize the bottles and tools used to make formula until your baby is at least 4 months old. Sterilize means to kill any germs that could make

your baby sick. Just washing everything in the dishwasher will not sterilize them. To learn how to sterilize, 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 the bottle liners, throw them away after your baby has finished eating.

How do I hold my baby to feed them formula?

- Cuddle or hold your baby close while you feed. 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 fast or slow 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 your baby's mouth and the formula fills the nipple. If the nipple is not full of formula your baby can swallow air. Swallowing air can make your baby gassy.
- Burp your baby after feeding. If they have a lot of gas, burp your baby half-way through feeding.
- Do not let your baby sip formula from a bottle when sleeping. This can lead to tooth decay. 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 them self until later in their first year. When your baby can feed them self, try offering the formula in a cup.

How often should I feed my baby?

Let your baby guide you when they want to feed. Feed your baby when you notice these early cues of hunger:

- Your baby brings their hands to their mouth.
- Your baby makes sucking motions or sounds.
- Your baby turns their head toward the person holding them, often with their mouth open (called rooting). They may reach their hands towards the person holding them.
- Your baby makes fists over their chest or belly.

For 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.

How much should I feed my baby?

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

- Closing their mouth.
- Sucking less.
- Turning away from the bottle or arching their back.
- Pushing away from the bottle or the person feeding.
- Relaxing their body, looking sleepy or falling asleep.

Newborn babies may drink very little at a feed. During the first month, your baby will gradually drink more formula. Your baby may drink more or less at each feed and this can change from day to day. It is more important to watch for your baby's cues of hunger and fullness than the amount they are drinking.

If your baby is not interested in a feeding, hold them for a few minutes then offer the bottle again. If they still aren't interested, don't make them feed. 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 Healthy Canadians – Infant formula www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/infant-care/infant-formula.html.

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles 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.