Infant formula feeding

If you are not able to breastfeed your baby, infant formula is the only safe way of feeding your baby to around 6 months of age. Formula-fed babies are kept on formula until 12 months of age in addition to complementary food. Talk to your doctor or child health nurse before you start feeding your baby infant formula.

When preparing and giving your baby infant formula:

- Follow the instructions on the can to make sure your baby is getting the right nourishment
- Sterilise bottles by boiling for 5 minutes
- Wash your hands before you prepare a bottle
- Keep feeding your baby on demand
- Hold your baby while he or she is drinking.

Combining breastfeeding and infant formula feeding

Feeding your baby any amount of breastmilk has benefits for you and your baby. You might be able to combine breastfeeding with formula feeding if you are unable to give your baby only breastmilk. Here are some tips to help you:

- Try to breastfeed first before giving formula.
- Any breastmilk has benefits to mother and baby, even if it is only a few drops.
- The more you can express or breastfeed, the more milk you will make.

Choosing an infant formula

There are many types of infant formula in grocery stores and chemists. Your doctor, child health nurse or dietitian will advise you on a suitable type of infant formula.

Remember…

- Cow’s milk-based formulas are right for most babies. They are recommended over infant formulas made from soy or goat’s milk.
- Special or soy-based formulas only need to be used for medical reasons. They should only be used with advice from a health professional.
- All infant formulas in Australia have enough nutrients to meet the growing needs of babies.
- Babies’ stomachs cannot break down regular milk. Avoid giving milk to babies younger than 12 months of age.

Getting started

Infant formulas can be a little bit different from one another. Always use the instructions on the can to make sure you are making it right for your baby. It is safest to feed your baby as soon as you make the formula. Only make 1 bottle at a time. Here is a list of steps for you to follow:

- Clean all preparation areas. Wash your hands using soap and water.
- Wash and sterilise bottles, teats and caps.
- Boil fresh water. If using an automatic kettle, let it switch off.
- Leave water to sit for at least 30 minutes to cool. Pour the right amount of water into the bottle.
- Add the amount of formula listed on the can. Too much and it can hurt your baby’s kidneys; too little and your baby won’t grow well. Measure the formula with the scoop from the can and level with a knife. Take care not to mix up scoops from other containers.
- Shake the bottle until the powder is dissolved.
- Check the temperature by putting a few drops on your wrist. It should feel just warm.
- You can now feed your baby. Hold your baby while he or she is drinking.
- Any formula left at the end of the feed must be discarded.
- Only keep made-up formula in the fridge for 24 hours.

Preparing feeds in advance

It is best to make 1 bottle of infant formula at a time, just before feeding. Sometimes you may need to make feeds in advance (e.g. for a babysitter). Here are some tips:

- Keep made-up feed in the fridge (temperature no higher than 5°C).
- Feeds can be stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours. Only remove when ready to be used.

Warming infant formula

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Stand the bottle of formula in a container of hot water for a few minutes (no more than 10 minutes). Using a microwave to rewarm feeds is not recommended, as it does not heat evenly and can burn your baby’s mouth. You can use a bottle warmer if you have one.

Check the temperature by putting a few drops onto the inside of your wrist. It should feel warm or even a little bit cool.

Any formula left at the end of the feed must be discarded.

Translating infant formula

The best way to transport formula is to carry individual portions of the powdered formula and cooled boiled water in sterilised containers. Formula can also be made before transporting. Here are some tips:

- Feeds that need to be transported should be put in the fridge until they are cold before transporting.
- Keep the feed in the fridge until it needs to be transported.
- Transport feeds in a cool bag with ice bricks and use within 2 hours. Place the formula in the fridge if you arrive before then. Use the formula within 24 hours from the time it was made.

Cleaning feeding equipment

Equipment needs to be cleaned and sterilised. Clean bottles and teats by hand or in a dishwasher. Bottles and teats can be sterilised by boiling or with a steaming machine. (Use steamers according to the manufacturers’ instructions).

Boiling method

- Wash hands.
- Wash teats and bottles in hot, soapy water using a bottle brush and rinse well.
- Place equipment in a saucepan of cold water on a stove.
- Bring to the boil and boil for 5 minutes. Turn off and allow to cool.
- Store equipment in a clean container in the fridge if not being used immediately.
- Sterilised equipment can be stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours.

How much formula?

Feed your baby on demand. Each baby is different and needs vary from day to day. Refer to the Is my baby getting enough milk? (http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/31/421/Is-My-Baby-Getting-Enough-Milk) sheet if you are concerned about how much your baby is drinking.

This is a general guide of how much infant formula your baby might need:

- 5 days to 3 months old: 150mL per kilogram of body weight each day.
- 3 to 6 months old: 120mL per kilogram of body weight each day.
- 6 to 12 months old: 100mL per kilogram of body weight each day. Babies at this age also eat complementary foods.

How to feed

- Sit comfortably with your baby in your arms while giving the bottle. Try holding your baby a different way each feed. This is because a baby’s skull is soft and changes in shape can occur if the baby always places their head in the same position.
- Hold the bottle tilted upside down. You can gently press under your baby’s chin to encourage your baby to firmly grip the teat. This will help the baby to not swallow air.
- Check the bottle flow. The milk should drop at a steady flow from the teat. Sometimes the teat gets clogged when a powdered infant formula is used.
- It is common for babies to swallow some air. You can help your baby to burp by holding them upright over your shoulder or on your lap. Pat or rub the middle of their back gently until they burp.
- If the baby is feeding happily, don’t stop until they are finished.
- Avoid leaving your baby to feed on their own or while going to sleep. The milk may flow too fast and cause your baby to choke.
- Your baby is feeding well if they have 6 or more wet nappies per day, consistent weight gain (following a curve on their growth chart), and are alert and content after a feed.

Resources for parents, families and carers


Related content

The importance of breastfeeding  

Managing common breast concerns  

Is my baby getting enough milk?  

Drinks for babies and toddlers  

Acknowledgements

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Information is drawn from:

- Children’s Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service 2015, *Child health information: Your guide to the first 12 months.*
- Preventative Health, Queensland Health 2010, *Breastfeeding and your baby.*

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