

Formula Feeding Your Baby Getting Started

Breast milk is the best food for babies, and most mothers can breastfeed. Before deciding to feed your baby formula, contact your local public health nurse, community nutritionist, Dial-A-Dietitian, family doctor, or the BC NurseLine. Support is available to help you breastfeed your baby.

For babies who are not breastfed nor fed donor breast milk, commercial infant formula is recommended.

Homemade formulas do not provide the nutrition your baby needs and are not recommended.

Which formula should I choose?

Buying formula

- Choose a milk-based commercial infant formula unless advised otherwise by your doctor or health care provider.
- Choose an iron-fortified formula, and give this from birth to 9 to 12 months.
- “Follow-up” formulas are not needed for babies under 1 year of age.
- Buy and use formula by the expiry date. Do not use dented or damaged cans, or cans with bulging tops or bottoms.

Types of infant formula

- *Ready-to-use* – do not add water
- *Concentrated liquid* – add water
- *Powder* – add water
- Ready-to-use formula is recommended if you do not have a safe water source.

Read and carefully follow the directions on how to make and store formula. Powder infant formula is not sterile and in rare cases has made babies sick. If your baby is **younger than 1 month old, premature, or ill**, use powdered infant formula only under your doctor's instruction. Otherwise, use liquid formula, which is sterile until the container is opened.

- If you do not have a fridge, talk to your public health nurse, community nutritionist or Dial-A-Dietitian about which type of formula to use.

What equipment do I need for formula feeding?

- Bottles, caps, rings and artificial nipples. Talk with your public health nurse about which artificial nipple to choose. Disposable bottle systems, such as holders, caps, nipples and liners, cost more.
- Bottle and artificial nipple brushes.
- A large pot, measuring cup, spoon, funnel, tongs and a knife, if using powder formula.

For more information, see BC HealthFile [#69b Formula Feeding Your Baby: Safely Preparing and Storing Formula](#).

How should I hold my baby while formula feeding?

- Cuddle or hold your baby close while feeding.
- Hold your baby's head higher than the body, keeping it supported, to make swallowing easier.
- Hold the bottle so that 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.
- Although your young baby may try to hold the bottle, she will not be able to feed herself until later in the first year.
- Let your baby set the pace. Do not rush feeding.
- Burp your baby after each feed. If your baby has a lot of gas, burp baby part way through the feed.
- Never prop the bottle in baby's mouth. This could cause choking, or tooth decay.

How often should I feed my baby?

Feed your baby when she shows signs of hunger (*hunger cues or feeding cues*). *Hunger cues* 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 eight times in 24 hours. It is normal for babies to feed during the night. Older babies usually feed less often.

Once your baby has her first teeth, continue to feed her on cue but do not let her 'sip' from a bottle of formula over long periods throughout the day and at sleep-times, as this can lead to tooth decay.

How much should I feed my baby?

- If your baby is growing well, follow her cues.
- Newborns may drink as little as one ounce (30 mL) at a feeding.
- Most babies drink about 2 to 4 ounces (60 to 120 mL) per feed during the first month and will gradually take more until they are drinking about 6 to 8 ounces (180 to 240 mL) at a time.
- Do not be too concerned about amounts of formula, and do not coax your baby to finish the bottle if he's not interested. Stop feeding when your baby shows signs of fullness. Signs that your baby is full include: he closes his mouth or turns away from the bottle, pushes away from the bottle or the person feeding, or seems very relaxed.

How long should my baby have formula?

- Formula fed babies should stay on formula until 9 to 12 months of age.
- Formula fed babies do not usually need extra vitamins.
- When your baby is 9 to 12 months old and eating a variety of iron-rich solids, pasteurized whole cow or goat milk that is fortified with vitamin D can be given instead of formula.
- Skim, 1% and 2% milk and soy drinks should not be given to children under two years of age because they are too low in fat.

- Rice drinks should not be given to children under two years of age because they are too low in fat and protein.

When should my baby have solid foods?

- When your baby is 6 months old, start offering solid foods, while continuing with the formula. For more information about introducing solid foods, see BC HealthFile [#69c Baby's First Foods](#), and [Toddler's First Steps](#).
- Do not add baby cereal or other foods to the bottle. Adding cereal does not help a baby sleep longer.

For more information, see the following BC HealthFiles:

[#69b Formula Feeding Your Baby: Safely Preparing and Storing Formula](#)

[#69c Baby's First Foods](#)

[#19a Infant Dental Care](#)

For more information, contact your local public health nurse, community nutritionist, or Dial-A-Dietitian at 604-732-9191 or 1-800-667-3438 to speak to a registered dietitian.



For more BC HealthFile topics visit www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm, or visit your local public health unit.

Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

Visit BC HealthGuide OnLine – a world of health information you can trust at www.bchealthguide.org