



Addressing the formula shortage

With the current formula shortage in the US, many parents are lost! There are many people weighing in on what to do right now. Before you listen to any of them, make sure they're qualified to give advice on this important topic. **There is a lot of misinformation out there right now.**

However, it's also frustrating because most of the experts are just telling parents what not to do. And parents just need to know what to do in order to actually feed their babies.

This guide is for education only and should not be taken as medical advice. **Remember to consult with your baby's pediatrician for personalized medical advice for your baby.**

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What you can do

Good News: Most babies will do fine with any standard infant formula type and/or brand available. Here are the things you CAN DO:

You can switch among all the confusing types, listed below, to whatever you can find that day

******as long as your baby doesn't have any true medical conditions or allergies***

- Standard cow's milk formula (Enfamil NeuroPro, Similac 360/Pro-Advance, Gerber Good Start GentlePro)
- Lactose-free formula which often has "sensitive" in the name (Similac Sensitive, Enfamil Neuropro sensitive)
- Partially hydrolyzed formula, which means that the milk proteins are slightly broken down, and often has "gentle" or "comfort" in the name (Enfamil Gentlease, Similac pro-total comfort, Good Start GentlePro or SoothePro)
- Soy-based formula (Enfamil ProSobee Similac Isomil, Gerber Good Start Soy)

- You can switch between brands.
- You can switch to a generic brand (Costco, Walmart, Target, Amazon, etc)
- You can order online or get it in person. You can also order online and then pick up in store (Target has this option)
- You can switch among preparation forms (eg: ready-to-feed liquid, powder, and concentrated liquid).

**These are general educational recommendations and should not be taken as personalized medical advice. Always check with your pediatrician for medical advice for your baby and family.*

What about babies on special formulas?

If your baby is on a specialized formula for a medical reason, you can try any brand/generic of that type.

If you cannot find an equivalent type, consult your child's doctor before switching to any other type.

These specialized formula types include:

- Extensively hydrolyzed protein formula, which means the milk proteins are very broken down, AKA "hypoallergenic" or "hydrosylate" formulas (Enfamil Nutramigen with Enflora LGG, Enfamil Pregestimil, Similac Alimentum, Gerber HA)
- Amino acid-based formulas (Neocate, Elecare Infant, Puramino, Alfamino Infant)
- Premature formulas (Enfamil Premature, Similac Special Care, Similac Neosure, Enfamil NeuroPro Enfacare)

Again, these types above are often used for a medical reason, so please do not switch among these types without consulting your baby's doctor first.



Don't add anything to the formula.



Don't dilute it.



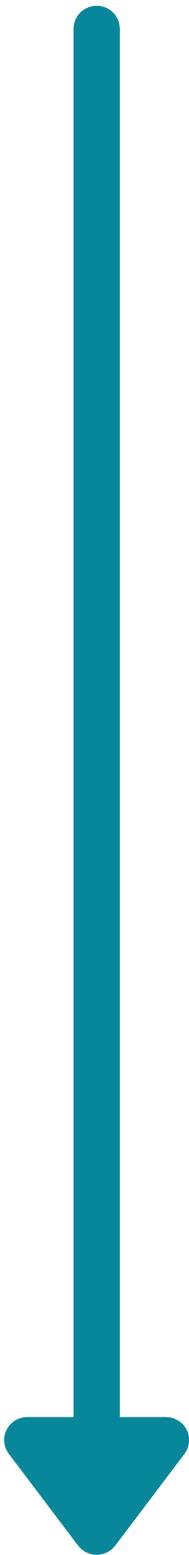
Don't change the ratios of water or powder in hopes of making it last longer.

This is all dangerous. Improper mixing can lead to electrolyte abnormalities which can cause seizures and/or death.

Follow the mixing instructions on the package.

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What about cow's milk?



Do consider giving whole cow's milk if your baby is 9-12 months old. I always tell patients that nothing magical happens on their first birthday regarding milk. Infants, especially those under 6-9 months old, definitely do not have mature enough guts to process large quantities of whole cow's milk. They can become dehydrated, iron deficient, and can even have some gastrointestinal (GI) bleeding and malabsorption of nutrients. But sometime after 6 months, their GI system starts to mature and are able to tolerate it. It is a gradual developmental process of the gut. So it is reasonable to consider using whole cow's milk especially if your baby is closer to 1 year old, is eating other solid foods, and isn't taking too much of it.

The American Academy of Pediatrics usually recommends starting at 12 months, although right now the AAP has said "it may be OK for some babies over 6 months of age to have cow's milk for a short period of time if no formula is available."

In Canada, they have been recommending whole cow's milk starting at 9-12 months for some time. If you choose to give whole cow's milk, do not give more than 16-24 oz per day. The main concern is that whole milk doesn't supply enough iron for your baby. So be sure to give iron-rich foods and consider also giving your baby a multivitamin with iron (eg: Poly-Vi-Sol with Iron).

Don't give your baby 1% (low-fat) or nonfat (skimmed) milk, as it does not contain enough fat and calories for brain and body development.

What about other types of milk and formula?

Don't give other types of milk. Do not give unmodified cow's milk, goat's milk, and do not give almond milk, soy milk, oat milk, or rice milk). They have inappropriate proportions of protein, fat, and carbohydrates and/or insufficient quantities of vitamins or minerals. Babies can get very sick from these. The biggest problem with goat's milk is that it does not contain enough vitamin D, vitamin B12, iron and especially folate. The biggest problem with plant-based milks is they are lower in fat and calories, both of which are integral for the development of an infant's brain and body.

Don't make your own formula. Homemade infant formulas can be very unsafe, can provide incorrect nutrition leading to poor growth, and can easily be contaminated leading to serious infections.

Consider giving European baby formulas (HiPP and Holle are the most popular brands). The AAP recommends against imported formula mainly because of lack of FDA regulation, shipping and storage concerns, and delayed recall notices. However, this is a safer alternative over diluting formula.

Do check the nutrition label on imported infant European or toddler formulas if that's all you can find. If there's enough iron, consider a multivitamin with iron if there's not (eg: Poly-Vi-Sol with Iron).

Do check the label on US toddler formula if that is all you can find. The nutrition, vitamins, and minerals in US infant formula are highly regulated. However this is not the case with US toddler formula, so you must check the nutrition label, and if the nutrition profile is similar to the infant formula nutrition profile that you have been using, you can consider this as an option.

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What about donor breast milk?

Milk banks are a trusted source because they medically screen the donors and they pasteurize the milk to ensure unwanted or dangerous bacteria and viruses aren't present in donor milk.

As donors need screening, we discourage the use of any milk from an anonymous donor or over the internet.

Informal milk sharing from family or friends has been increasingly popular, especially now. If that's something you're considering, do make sure the donor is medically screened and that safe milk handling practices are followed.

The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine has excellent guidance on this.

Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine's 2017 Position Statement on Informal Breast Milk Sharing for the Term Healthy Infant

Here's a useful table from the above position statement from the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine:

TABLE 1. GUIDELINES FOR MEDICAL SCREENING OF POTENTIAL MILK DONORS

1. Mother-to-mother screening process through face-to-face and/or telephone interview/conversation. Donor mothers should be:
 - In good health
 - Only on medications or herbal preparations that are compatible with breastfeeding. It is recommended that LactMed¹¹ and "Medications and Mother's Milk" by Dr. Thomas Hale¹² be used for decisions on whether medications are compatible with breastfeeding.
2. Review the donor mother's prenatal and (if performed) regular postnatal infectious screening tests. The donor mother should be negative for:
 - HIV
 - Hepatitis B virus
 - HTLV-1 (in high prevalence areas)
3. Social practices. A woman is not a suitable breast milk donor if she
 - uses illegal drugs or marijuana,
 - smokes or uses tobacco products, including nicotine gum, patch, e-cigarettes,
 - consumes >1.5 ounces (44 mL) of hard liquor/spirits, 12 ounces (355 mL) of beer, 5 ounces (148 mL) of wine, or 10 ounces (296 mL) of wine coolers (beverage of wine and fruit juice with lower alcohol content than wine) daily, and
 - is at risk for HIV or had a sexual partner within past 12 months who is at risk for HIV.

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Get In Touch With A Doctor

You can schedule a telemedicine visit or in person visit to talk to your doctor about what the best options are for your family.



Schedule a weight check with your baby's doctor if you're not sure if they're getting enough from breastfeeding or pumped breastmilk alone. Especially if your baby is under 6 months old, this can be very helpful.

In many cases, giving breastmilk alone is enough and you don't have to "top off" with formula, so check with your baby's doctor if you're unsure.



Ask your pediatrician or OBGYN's office to see if they have free samples of formula that they can give you.



Have you recently stopped breastfeeding? You can consider re-lactating. The first step would be to start pumping again frequently to get supply up and also engage a breastfeeding specialist for more guidance.

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Resources

[American Academy Of Pediatrics](#)

[Gerber's MyGerber Baby Expert](#) : Reach a certified nutrition or lactation consultant by phone, text, Facebook Messenger, web chat, or video call, who can help you identify a similar formula that may be more readily available

Abbott's Consumer Hotline: call 1-800-986-8540

[Abbott's](#) urgent product request line for specialized formulas

[Abbot formula alternative chart](#)

[United Way's 2-1-1](#) : Dial 2-1-1 to be connected to a community resource specialist affiliated with United Way who may be able to help you identify food pantries and other charitable sources of local infant formula and baby food.

[Feeding America](#) : call your local food bank to ask whether they have infant formula and other supplies in stock.

[Human Milk Banking Association of North America \(HMBANA\)](#): certain HMBANA-accredited milk banks are distributing donated breast milk to mothers in need; please note that some may require a prescription from a medical professional.

[WIC-Eligible Families](#) : Contact your local WIC office to identify or obtain additional sources of infant formula nearby.