

Types of Infant Formula

Breastfeeding is the best for babies. Expressed breast milk is the next best option. Babies who are not breastfed may be at higher risk of ill health. Breastfeeding has health benefits for mothers also. Most mothers are able to produce breast milk. Your midwife can tell you more about breastfeeding.



If you decide not to breastfeed or not to use expressed milk, infant formula is needed. There are different types of infant formula. It is important to use a formula that is suitable for your baby and to prepare it correctly. A wrong formula or one made up incorrectly could make your baby ill. Most formula is made from cows or goats milk processed to make it easier for the baby to digest the formula. It has added ingredients such as vitamins and fats to help meet the nutritional requirements of babies.

All brands of formula are basically the same as the ingredients must meet the regulations.

Whey based infant milk formula (or first milk) is recommended for formula fed infants from birth until one year of age.

Casein based or curd infant milk formula is advertised "for hungrier babies". There is no scientific evidence that this type of formula is better for "hungry" babies. Casein based formula may be harder to digest than whey based formula because it forms a thick curd in the stomach.

Follow-on formula are advertised for babies over 6 months of age. A baby who is eating a variety of foods and drinking whey based infant formula does not need follow-on formula.

Formula for babies with special conditions

Soya formula is processed from soya beans with vitamins and other nutrients added. It is used for babies who cannot take cows milk or when a family wishes to avoid all animal products. The sugar in soya formula can damage the baby's teeth so should be fed by cup rather than bottle after 6 months.

Low birth weight formula is processed to be more suitable than standard formula for low birth weight infants. Breast milk is very valuable for low birth weight infants.

High energy formula is used for formula fed malnourished infants.

Hydrolysed or low-allergenic formula is used in cases of diagnosed food allergies in infants who are not breastfed.

Special formulas should only be used on the advice of a dietitian, paediatrician, or other health professional with knowledge of these special formulas and your baby's condition.

Using a special formula if you baby does not need it could make your baby ill.

Drinks NOT to give your baby

Breast milk or whey based infant formula is all your baby needs to drink in the first six months. Ordinary cows milk or soya milk or goats milk should not be used as the main drink before 12 months of age. Infants under 6 months of age do not need fruit juice or teas.

Cost of formula feeding



Six months formula powder costs about €22. In addition you will need to buy bottles, teats, cleaning and sterilising equipment. If your tap water is not suitable, you will need to buy bottled water that has less than 20 milligrams of sodium (Na) per litre. All water for formula needs to be boiled before use, which also costs money. Hot water is needed to wash bottles and teats.

Talk about the cost and preparation of formula feeding with your midwife, nurse, or social worker to make sure you can safely feed your baby this way.

Discuss any problems with feeding with your midwife, nurse, doctor or dietitian.