

Information for families having difficulty finding formula



Babies need the right mix of nutrients to stay healthy, and these nutrients are found in human breast milk and in formula approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). As parents and caregivers across the nation struggle to find formula, your baby's health depends on using products that meet federal standards and are prepared according to directions on the label. During this stressful time, the California Department of Public Health and the American Academy of Pediatrics offer tips to keep your baby safe.

How to find formula

- Shop at different times of the day. Stores get shipments at different times of the day, so the shelves may be empty in the morning and stocked in the evening.
- Have family and friends help you to find supplies to avoid making multiple trips to stores, food banks, or other community-based formula resources.
- Check with your health care provider if your baby needs premature or therapeutic formula. They may have supplies on hand or other suggestions to help.
- Call your local WIC office for help. If you are eligible for WIC, the local WIC office can help get you enrolled and provide any assistance they can with formula.
- Call 2-1-1 to get connected to local resources or visit www.211.org.
- Consider using human milk from one of the following certified human milk banks: mothersmilk.org or uchealth.service-now.com/csp.

Babies not on therapeutic or specialty formula usually tolerate changing from one brand to another

- Use a different formula. Some formula is now available in stores that is made outside of the U.S., but is still FDA approved.
- Remember to mix formula safely using the directions on the label. Always add the right amount of water. Adding too much water or too little formula is dangerous. Diluted formula can lead to imbalances in minerals like sodium which can harm nerve and brain function.
- Wash your hands, equipment, and surfaces before preparing the formula. Harmful bacteria can make babies sick if hands and preparation areas are not clean.
- Do not use formula after the "use by" expiration date. This date guarantees the safety, nutrient content, and quality of the formula.

Pasteurized whole cow's milk can be an alternative for some children

- Cow's milk is NOT recommended for babies under 6 months old and it is not recommended for babies on specialty formulas to use cow's milk.
- If your baby is 6 months or older you may consider using cow's milk for a few days until you can find formula or reach your health care provider. Using cow's milk longer than a week can have health risks for your baby.
- Most infants do not transition to cow's milk before their first birthday, but some could transition sooner at 10 or 11 months. Talk to your health care provider about this option.

Scan for more information and resource links



Your child might be ready for solid food and this could reduce your need for formula

Introduction to solid food for older babies:

- While formula and human breast milk are the most important foods in a baby's diet until their first birthday, parents can experiment with transitioning to solids around 4-6 months.
- A baby is on the cusp of transitioning to solid foods if they show signs of readiness, like the ability to sit up, control their head and neck, and swallow food rather than push it out of their mouth with their tongue.
- Ask a health care provider if your baby is ready to try solid foods.

For healthy infants 10 months and older:

- At this age, appetite may vary from day to day so there are some days more foods will be needed and other days when more formula or human milk may be needed.
- A baby might be ready for more solid food if they eat a variety of baby foods, including mashed foods and table food, and are starting to use a cup. Formula can become a snack or supplement to solid food.
- If you cannot find formula, talk with your pediatrician since it may be possible for your baby to start cow's milk for a short period of time while continuing to try solid foods, especially high-iron foods.
- Ask a health care provider if your baby needs vitamins with iron.

Consider additional breastfeeding options

- Maybe you can breastfeed a little longer. If you have thought about weaning, you may want to consider waiting.
- Maybe you can give less formula and more breast milk. If you provide both human milk and formula, it may be possible to increase your milk supply. Talk to your health care provider or lactation consultant.

Do not try remedies on your own as young infants are fragile

Do not use homemade formula

- Formulas must be reviewed and approved by the FDA, because safely mixing all the ingredients in formula is difficult and must be done correctly.
- Even small mistakes can lead to a baby becoming sick from harmful bacteria. Too much of some ingredients can stress an infant's kidneys. Too little of some nutrients and your baby may not get the nutrition they need to grow and develop.
- Although homemade formula was used in the past, it comes with many risks to infants. Online recipes for homemade baby formula have significant safety concerns due to the potential for contamination and improper nutrient concentration. Babies have been hospitalized from reported use of homemade formulas.

Milk alternatives that are fine for adults can be dangerous for babies

- Goat's milk is very high in **protein** and minerals, which can cause dehydration and be harmful to your baby's kidneys.
- Toddler milks are not "formulas." They are nutritional drinks made from powdered milk and **sugar** and do not provide the nutritional content that babies need. If you **absolutely have no other choice**, these products or cow's milk can be safe for a few days for babies who are close to a year old.
- Plant milks like soy, rice, oat, and hemp milk are not a safe alternative to formula. They are missing many ingredients and do not have the right kind of **fat** for a baby's growing brain.

If you cannot find formula and none of the above suggestions will work for your baby, call your health care provider as they can assess the situation, suggest further alternatives to help and some may have samples of formula they can provide. If you are worried about your baby and cannot reach your health care provider, you can also get help at the local hospital emergency department.