

Bottle feeding Infants Can Be a Nutritional Alternative to Breastfeeding

By Annabelle Martin, M.D., and Aparna Eligeti, M.D.

Q: I WAS BREASTFEEDING MY BABY THE FIRST COUPLE OF WEEKS, BUT IT WASN'T GOING WELL AT ALL. I DECIDED TO STOP AND BEGIN BOTTLE FEEDING. HOW CAN I GET THE MOST OUT OF THESE FEEDINGS TO GIVE MY BABY AS MANY ADVANTAGES AS I CAN?

A: Although breast milk offers newborns all the nutrition they need, not every mom can or chooses to breastfeed. And moms who do breastfeed may find that supplementing with infant formula when baby gets older is a practical alternative if they go back to work or when Dad feeds baby. It's important to know that commercially prepared baby formulas are FDA-regulated to provide babies all of the nutrients they need.

There are three basic forms of formula: powders (least expensive), liquid concentrates (generally diluted with an equal part of water), and ready-to-use baby formulas. The ingredients in the formula will help determine which is best for your baby:

- ***Milk-based formula*** – made with cow's milk, vegetable oils, vitamins and minerals and usually iron-fortified. These are appropriate for healthy full-term babies.
- ***Soy-based formula*** – made with soy protein, vegetable oils, corn syrup and/or sucrose (for carbohydrates) and sometimes iron. These are good for babies with lactose intolerance or those who have allergies to the whole protein in cow's milk or who are on a vegetarian-based diet. Soy infant formulas aren't recommended for low birth-weight or preterm babies.
- ***Specialty formulas*** – There are many varieties of specialty formulas, including those for low birth-weight babies, low-sodium formulas for babies who need restricted salt intake, and "predigested" protein formulas for babies who can't tolerate or have allergies to the whole proteins in cow's milk and milk-based formulas.

Talk with your pediatrician for recommendations for your baby. You may have a chance to sample a few different formulas since many hospitals send moms home with free baby formula or coupons.

There are other tips to providing your infant with the best feeding experience possible. The proper positioning of babies is important. Some parents, for example, lay their babies completely flat, which can make babies choke when feeding on the bottle. Be sure to have your baby semi-inclined or upright. Another common mistake is propping the bottle, which also can be a choking hazard. Always be present when baby is feeding, even when she is old enough to hold her own bottle.

When you are bottle feeding, make sure milk is filling up the nipple of baby's bottle. Otherwise, she could swallow a lot of air. Bottles should never be heated in the microwave, which can create hot spots in the milk. Instead, place the bottle in a mug of warm water for a few minutes before feeding.

Your baby's feeding schedule probably won't change much if you're using breast milk in the baby's bottle. But if you're using formula, you may go longer between feedings or have fewer feedings because formula is a little thicker and slower to digest. Newborns tend to take in about one to two ounces per bottle feeding. Babies who are six to eight months old normally will take in six to eight ounces per bottle.

No matter which method you choose – breast feeding or bottle feeding – remember to touch and cuddle your baby often. Your skin-to-skin contact and soft reassuring voice will help your baby bond with you and make feeding a pleasurable experience for both of you.

Always talk with your physician or health care provider if you have questions about caring for your infant. They are there to help.

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