

From Breastfeeding to Formula: A Complete Feeding Guide



Highlights

There are several ways to feed your baby, depending on what best suits you both. The World Health Organization recommends that you give your baby breastmilk for their first 6 months.

If you don't plan to breastfeed, you can give your baby expressed breast milk or infant formula.

In This Article

How to Feed Your Baby

Top Tips for Deciding How to Feed Your Baby

The Benefits of Breastfeeding

What If I Can't Decide If I Want to Breastfeed or Not?

Expressed Breast Milk

What If I Don't Want to Breastfeed?

Formula - What Do I Need to Know?

Tools and Assistance

How to Feed Your Baby

There are several ways to feed your baby, depending on what suits you both.

Babies need milk that has certain qualities to help them grow and thrive. They can't digest any other form of food until they're around 6 months old.

The World Health Organization recommends that you feed your baby only breastmilk for their first 6 months. This is called exclusive breastfeeding. After that, you can introduce solid foods while you continue breastfeeding.

If you don't plan to breastfeed, you can give your baby:

- expressed breast milk
- infant formula

Depending on your situation, you may consider mixed feeding. Mixed feeding can involve:

- breastfeeding and formula
- breastfeeding, expressed breast milk, and formula
- breastfeeding and donor breast milk
- expressed breast milk, formula, and/or donor milk

Babies who are premature or sick may be able to get human donor milk.

Top Tips for Deciding How to Feed Your Baby

Speak with your doctor or midwife about what's right for you.

Understand that breastfeeding is a skill that every mother and baby can learn. Be patient with yourself and your baby as you both learn what's involved in feeding.

Only you know what's right for you and your baby.

Remember, what's important is that your baby gets the nutrition they need to grow and thrive.

The Benefits of Breastfeeding

For Your Baby

Breastmilk helps:

improve your baby's immunity due to antibodies in your breast milk
support healthy weight gain
reduce the risk of sudden unexplained death in infancy (SUDI)

Any amount of breastfeeding is beneficial, even if you choose to give breastmilk and formula.

For You

Breastfeeding helps:

your uterus contract and return to its pre-pregnancy size
prevent a range of health issues such as breast cancer, ovarian cancer, hypertension (high blood pressure), and type 2 diabetes

For Your Family

Breastfeeding helps reduce the cost of feeding your baby. When you exclusively breastfeed, your baby needs no other food or drink until about 6 months of age.

What If I Can't Decide If I Want to Breastfeed or Not?

You'll probably have lots of questions about breastfeeding. Some of these won't be answered until your baby is born.

You can find out more about breastfeeding by:

asking for advice from people whose opinion you respect
researching and fact-checking using quality, evidence-based sources

Try to keep an open mind. Lots of people who try breastfeeding find that they enjoy it.

Expressed Breast Milk

Expressing is a way to get milk out of your breasts by hand or by using a pump.

Expressing allows your partner or your baby's other parent to feed your baby from a bottle. This is a good way for them to connect with each other.

Expressing allows you to continue feeding your baby when you're apart, such as when you go back to work.

Babies who are premature or unwell at birth can struggle to learn how to suck effectively. Some women are advised to express their colostrum before giving birth, so it can be frozen and offered to the baby after birth.

What If I Don't Want to Breastfeed?

Some women simply feel that breastfeeding is not something they want to do.

You may or may not want to breastfeed. Reasons for not breastfeeding may be because you:

- take certain medicines
- are unwell or have a medical condition such as breast cancer
- have had breastfeeding difficulties in the past
- don't have support from your partner, family, or friends
- don't have a supportive workplace

Formula - What Do I Need to Know?

Formula is a breast milk substitute. Formula can be bought as:

- powder - that you mix with cooled boiled water
- liquid - ready to drink

It's important to read the product information and prepare the formula exactly as the manufacturer says.

Babies who receive formula grow and thrive if the formula is prepared correctly and they drink enough of it.

If you plan to feed your baby formula from birth, you may need to take your own

bottles, formula, and teats to the hospital.

Tools and Assistance

For help and advice on feeding your baby, you can talk with:

Your midwife, child health nurse, or doctor: These healthcare professionals can provide guidance and answer any questions you may have about feeding your baby, whether you're breastfeeding, formula feeding, or expressing milk.

A lactation consultant: Lactation consultants are experts who can assist with breastfeeding techniques, troubleshooting any issues, and providing emotional support. They can help you and your baby learn how to breastfeed effectively, overcome challenges, and create a successful breastfeeding experience.

Breastfeeding Support Groups: Many communities have support groups where mothers can share their experiences, ask questions, and get encouragement. These groups can offer a sense of community and reassurance during your breastfeeding journey.

Breastfeeding Helplines: Several organizations offer free phone or online helplines to support breastfeeding mothers. Trained counselors can assist with breastfeeding questions, concerns, and provide helpful tips on various topics.

Online Resources and Courses: There are many online resources and courses available to help new parents learn more about breastfeeding. These resources may include videos, articles, and step-by-step guides that cover everything from positioning to troubleshooting common breastfeeding challenges.

Breastfeeding Apps: Some mobile apps are designed to track your baby's feeding schedule, weight gain, and other milestones. These apps can help you stay organized and ensure you're keeping track of your baby's needs.