

SAFELY PREPARING INFANT FORMULA

How you choose to feed your baby is an important decision. York Region is here to support you every step of the way.

This resource is for healthy, full-term babies. Talk to your health professional if your baby is:

- Immunocompromised or has special needs
- Less than two months of age and was born prematurely or had low birth weight

OFFERING BREASTMILK AND FORMULA

Any amount of breastmilk* you provide offers important benefits, including helping your baby get sick less often. **Breastmilk contains unique properties that formulas cannot copy.** If you provide breastmilk and formula at the same feed, offer breastmilk first to maximize the benefits.

If you supplement with formula temporarily, talk to your health professional about what formula to offer to reduce the risk of your baby developing a cow's milk allergy. If formula is offered because you feel your milk supply is low, contact York Region for support.

FORMULA OPTIONS

Commercial infant formula is the only substitute for breastmilk. **Do not offer homemade formula.** It will not meet your baby's nutritional needs and can make them sick. Types of formula include:

Stage 1 (0-12 months/ 0 months*) formulas [approved by Health Canada](#) are acceptable.

Stage 2 (follow-up/6 months*) are **not** needed; older babies will meet their nutritional needs with stage 1 formula and solid foods.

Stage 3 (toddler milks/12 months*) are not infant formulas and are **not appropriate**.

Infant formula is not needed past 12 months of age unless advised by your health professional.

If your baby received formula in a hospital or clinic setting, you do not need to use the same brand unless it is medically required.

THESE ARE NOT FORMULA SUBSTITUTES

- Homemade formulas
- Cow's or goat's milk, including evaporated or powdered versions
- Plant-based beverages (soy, rice, oat, pea)
- Any toddler beverage (12 months and older)

INGREDIENTS AND SPECIALTY FORMULAS

Most formulas are cow's milk-based, meaning the protein source is from cow's milk. Other formulas are goat's milk-based or soy-based.

All formulas are similar in calories, protein and fat.

Formula does not promote growth more effectively than breastmilk.

Despite marketing, there is no evidence that partially broken-down proteins (promoted as easier-to-digest) help with sleep, digestion or colic.

Iron in formula does **not cause constipation** and is important for growth and development.

**The term breastmilk is used, but human milk can be used interchangeably. The terms infant formula and formula are used interchangeably.*

PUBLIC HEALTH

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26-PH2-060



Evidence is lacking that added DHA, nucleotides, prebiotics and probiotics to formula has an impact on growth, sleep, brain development or immunity.

Lactose intolerance is rare in babies. Only use lactose-reduced, lactose-free and other specialty formulas, like hypoallergenic or thickened ones, if your health professional recommends it.

Remember that it is normal for babies to have some gas, spit up or need nighttime feeds.

Get information about formula from unbiased sources, not from formula company websites or social media, including influencers and blogs.

IMPORTED FORMULAS

There are more formula choices than ever, including some Health Canada approved [imported infant formulas](#).

Avoid imported formulas not approved by Health Canada. They may not meet Canadian manufacturing and safety guidelines. You might also miss important safety recalls.

Imported formulas, like European brands, often cost more. Marketing may seem like they are better than others, but the evidence is limited.

BUY FROM REPUTABLE SOURCES

Use caution if buying from 3rd-party websites where the source is unclear, so you are not receiving a counterfeit or unsafe product.

Avoid buying formula on social media or from other parents due to safety concerns, like bacterial risk from opened containers or unknown shipping and storage methods.

LIQUID AND POWDERED OPTIONS

There are two types of liquid formulas:

- Ready-to-feed (no added water needed)
- Liquid concentrate (added water needed)

Liquid formulas are sterile and have less risk for bacteria growth compared to powdered formula.

Health Canada recommends liquid formula for babies who are immunocompromised or are less

than two months of age born prematurely or low birth weight. If liquid formula is not available, then powdered, when prepared correctly, is an option.

Powdered formulas are not sterile and need extra attention when preparing to lower bacteria risk.

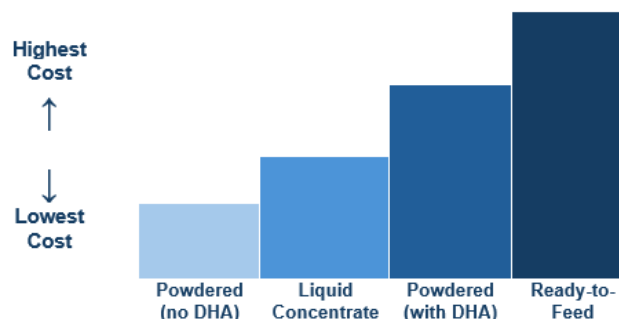
Follow preparation instructions closely since mixing incorrectly can impact growth, hydration and make your baby sick.

Instructions can vary by brand. Check how much water is needed for each scoop of powder.

FORMULA COSTS

Powdered formulas with added ingredients like DHA, nucleotides, prebiotics and probiotics are not needed and are sold at a much higher price; often 60% more* than standard powdered formulas.

INFANT FORMULA COST PROGRESSION*



*Based on 2025 York Region Public Health infant formula costing.

SWITCHING FORMULAS

If it is the **same formula**, you can switch between powdered and liquid formula.

If **switching formulas**, your baby may have temporary gastrointestinal changes like changes in bowel movement frequency, texture and colour.

If you think your baby is not tolerating a formula, talk to your health professional.

FORMULA RECALLS

Visit Canadian Food Inspection Agency for [formula recalls](#) (search 'infant formula') or [sign up](#) for alerts (select "Infant products" under 'Food').

WATER OPTIONS

Use cold municipal tap water or commercial bottled water. **Distilled, special baby or nursery water are not required.** Do not use carbonated, mineral or softened water.

If you use well water, test for bacteria and chemicals, like nitrites/nitrates and lead levels. York Region offers [free well water testing](#) for bacteria or visit a private lab, at a fee, to test for chemicals.

VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is added to formula, so your baby does not need extra vitamin D if you offer formula only.

If you feed your baby both breastmilk and formula, offer a vitamin D supplement of 400 IU per day.

STORING FORMULA CONTAINERS

- Use before the “expiry” date.
- Store unopened containers in a cool, dry place and avoid direct sunlight or freezing.
- To store opened liquid or powdered formula containers, see manufacturer’s instructions.

PREPARING FORMULA

Start by washing your hands and cleaning the countertop. Then wash and rinse all equipment (cup, syringe, bottles, nipples, spoon or tongs) after each use. Use glass or BPA-free bottles and nipples with no cracks, stains or loose pieces.

STERILIZE EQUIPMENT

1. Cover equipment fully in a pot of water at a rolling boil for two minutes.
2. Drain and air-dry in the pot or on a clean cloth.
3. Cover for later use.

If you use a commercial sanitizer, follow the manufacturer’s instructions.

BOIL ALL WATER SOURCES

Boil water at a **rolling boil for two minutes** in a pot or stovetop kettle. Avoid electric kettles since they do not keep water at a rolling boil.

When preparing liquid concentrated formula, use water cooled to room or body temperature.

WATER TEMPERATURE FOR POWDERED FORMULA

Preparing one bottle to feed right away: Use water cooled to room or body temperature.

Preparing bottles for later use: Use boiled water cooled to no less 70°C (158°F) to lower the risk of bacterial contamination.** Use a food grade thermometer or let the water sit in the pot for no more than 30 minutes after being boiled.

Automatic formula dispensers and water warmer systems may not heat the water to 70°C (158°F).

** For babies that are immunocompromised, less than two months of age born prematurely or low birth weight, water used to prepare powdered formula – whether for feeding right away or for later use – should be boiled and cooled to no less than 70°C (158°F).

MIXING FORMULA

Follow mixing instructions carefully. Prepared formula can be stored in the fridge for 24 hours.

READY-TO-FEED FORMULA

Pour the desired amount of formula into the bottle.
Do not add additional water.

LIQUID CONCENTRATE FORMULA

1. Pour and measure the water in the bottle.
2. Add an equal amount of liquid formula.

POWDERED FORMULA

Read instructions carefully since brands can vary on how much water to use per scoop.

1. Pour and measure the water in the bottle.
2. Add the correct number of leveled scoops of powder. Only use the scoop provided.
3. Mix (shake or stir) until there are no lumps.
4. Check the temperature on the inside of your wrist before feeding. If it is warm, it should feel between room or body temperature.

To lower the risk of bacterial growth:

- Throw away any unused formula sitting at room temperature **within two hours**.
- Do not place formula back into the fridge once you have offered it.

WARMING FORMULA IS OPTIONAL

If you choose to warm formula:

1. Place the bottle under warm running water, in a bowl of warm water or an electric bottle warmer on a low setting; do not use a microwave as it can cause “hot spots” and burn your baby’s mouth.
2. Warm formula for up to 15 minutes; not longer due to a higher the risk of bacterial growth.
3. Check the temperature by placing a small amount on the inside of your wrist; it should feel between room or body temperature.

RESPONSIVE FEEDING

During the first few months, your baby will drink at least eight times every 24 hours. Feeding times may vary and **it is normal to feed during the night for many months.**

Respond to your baby’s cues and trust they know **when** and **how much** to drink. Feed your baby when they show earlier signs of hunger.

Earlier signs of hunger:

- Stirring or moving arms
- Opening mouth or yawning or smacking lips
- Turning head looking for food
- Placing hands into their mouth
- Sucking or licking movements
- Getting restless
- Making cooing or sighing sounds

Late signs of hunger:

- Getting fussy, agitated or starting to cry
- Getting exhausted and falling asleep

If your baby is too hungry and difficult to calm, hold them skin-to-skin to help them settle.

Fullness signs:

- Sucking action (the pace) slows down or stops
- Letting go of the bottle nipple or losing interest
- Turning head away or pushing away from the bottle or the person feeding

Hold your baby and keep feedings calm and relaxing. This is a time to bond with your baby.

Avoid using fast flow nipples. If they cough, dribble milk, bring their hands to their face or work hard to catch their breath, the flow may be too fast. See our [bottle feeding](#) resource on how to bottle feed.

Do not prop the bottle. Propped bottle devices are illegal to sell in Canada due to safety concerns.

BURPING

Babies often burp partway through and at the end of a feed. It helps bring up air swallowed during a feed. Your baby may need to be burped if they are:

- Arching their back
- Getting cranky or fussy
- Pulling away from the bottle
- Sucking slows down or stops

CARING FOR GUMS AND TEETH

Clean your baby’s gums, inside of cheeks and roof of mouth with a clean, soft damp cloth after each feeding, even if they fall asleep while feeding.

As soon as the first tooth appears, brush them gently, at least twice a day, using a small, soft toothbrush and water. If it has been recommended by your dental professional, brush with a rice-grain size amount of fluoridated toothpaste.

Visit the dentist for a dental screening by their first birthday (or no more than six months after their first tooth comes in) and continue routine check-ups. York Region has [free dental screening](#) if you do not have a dentist.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit york.ca/FeedingKids for additional nutrition resources, including a [video](#) on how to safely prepare infant formula.

For other York Region Public Health topics, visit york.ca/Breastfeeding, york.ca/Parenting, york.ca/Dental

To speak to a Public Health Nurse, contact York Region’s Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 or york.ca/NurseChat

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