

When children are not breastfed or are partially breastfed, commercial cow's milk-based infant formulas should be used as an alternative to breast milk until 12 months of age<sup>1</sup>.

With the vast array of different formulas on the market and companies often promoting their product as better than their competitors, it is easy to understand why families/carers are often confused about what is the most appropriate infant formula to feed the baby. Some families/carers may wish to use alternative infant formula with their baby.

Breastfeeding is the healthiest start for infants and exclusive breastfeeding should be encouraged, supported and promoted until around six months of age, with continued breastfeeding until 12 months of age while appropriate solid foods are being introduced.

## Alternative infant formulas

It is recommended that a cow's milk based formula is used until a child reaches 12 months of age. Special formulas such as soy or goat milk based formulas are only recommended if there are specific medical, cultural or religious reasons. It is important to note that these types of formulas may cost more than regular cow's milk formulas.



Cow's milk as a drink should not be given to babies under 12 months of age.

If families/carers think their baby may have an allergy to cow's milk formula, it is recommended they speak to a doctor. Soy or goat's milk formulas are usually not the most appropriate for babies with a cow's milk allergy.



Alternative infant formula and current recommendations on their use is provided over the page.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Dietary Guidelines 2013

## Soy infant formula

- Is made from soybeans and does not contain any animal products.
- Does not contain lactose (a natural sugar in cow's milk and breast milk).
- If a baby has a problem with lactose intolerance, there are other formulas that may be more appropriate.
- Does not prevent or reduce the risk of developing allergies and is not a suitable alternative to cow's milk-based formula.

## Goat's milk infant formula

- Contains lactose.
- Is not considered to have any role in preventing or treating allergies.
- Many infants who are allergic to cow's milk are also allergic to goat's milk.
- Is not recommended without medical supervision or advice.

## Infant formula with probiotics or prebiotics

- There is currently insufficient evidence to recommend the use of these infant formulas.

## Formulas for managing other infant conditions

- A number of formulas are marketed in Australia, claiming they are suited for managing minor conditions and symptoms. There is lack of evidence of their efficacy.
- Certain medical conditions may require special formulas but these are only recommended under medical supervision.

## Verdict:

If choosing an infant formula for babies from birth, infant formula marked as '**starter**', '**newborn**', or '**Step 1**' formulas are good choices. See **NAQ Nutrition Food Foundations** fact sheet '*infant formula*' for more information on starter and follow-on formulas.

Soy or goat's milk-based formulas are not suitable alternatives for infants with allergies to cow's milk-based formulas unless used under medical supervision. Therefore it is recommended families/carers speak with a doctor if they think their baby may have an allergy to cow's milk formula, to seek their recommendations on the best choice for the baby before changing to an alternative infant formula.

## Tips:

- If using different infant formula brands, it is important to carefully read the preparation instructions as these may differ from brand to brand.

*For further advice, speak with a child health nurse, paediatrician or dietitian.*