

Solid foods and milk for your baby

As your baby eats more solid foods, the amount of milk they want will decrease.

Once your baby is eating plenty of solids several times a day, they may take less milk at each feed or even drop a milk feed altogether.

You should continue to breastfeed or give your baby infant formula until they're at least one year old. Breastfeeding will continue to benefit you and your baby for as long as you carry on.

Beakers and cups for babies

If you're bottle feeding, it's a good idea to introduce a cup rather than a bottle from about six months. By the time your baby is one, they should have stopped using bottles with teats. Otherwise, they may find it hard to break the habit of comfort sucking on a bottle.

Comfort sucking on sweetened drinks is the biggest cause of tooth decay in young children. When using a bottle or trainer cup, don't put anything in it other than formula milk, breast milk or water.

Using an open cup or a free-flow cup without a valve will help your baby learn to sip rather than suck, which is better for their teeth.

Choosing a baby beaker or cup

It's important to choose the right kind of beaker or cup. A beaker with a free-flow lid (without a non-spill valve) is better than a bottle or beaker with a teat. Drinks flow very slowly through a teat, which means that children spend a lot of time with the teat in their mouth. As soon as your child is ready, encourage them to move from a lidded beaker to drinking from an open cup.

Drinks for babies and young children

Not all drinks are suitable for babies and young children. Here's what to give to your child and when:

Breast milk

This is the only food or drink babies need in the first six months of their life. It should continue to be given alongside an increasingly varied diet once you introduce solid foods.

Formula milk

This is usually based on cows' milk and is the only suitable alternative to breast milk in the first 12 months of your baby's life. [Cows' milk](#) can be introduced from 12 months.

Non-cows' milk formula

Goats' milk formula is available and produced to the same nutritional standards as cows' milk formula. It isn't suitable for babies with [cows' milk protein allergy](#) and shouldn't be given to these babies unless recommended by a health professional.

You should also only give your baby soya formula if a health professional advises you to.

'Goodnight' milk

This isn't suitable for babies under six months old. You can start using it after this age, but you don't have to as there are no proven health benefits compared to using regular formula.

Water

Fully breastfed babies don't need any water until they've started eating solid foods. Bottle-fed babies may need some extra water in hot weather.

For babies under six months, use water from the mains tap in the kitchen. You will need to boil then cool the tap water as it's not sterile straight from the tap. Water for babies over six months doesn't need to be boiled.

Bottled water isn't recommended for making up formula feeds as it may contain too much salt (sodium) or sulphate. If you do have to use bottled water to make up a feed, check the label to make sure the sodium (also written as Na) level is less than 200 milligrams (mg) per litre. The sulphate (also written as SO or SO₄) content shouldn't be higher than 250mg per litre.

Like tap water, bottled water isn't sterile, so it will need to be boiled before you use it to prepare a feed. Always use boiled water at a temperature of at least 70C when you prepare a feed. Remember to let the feed cool before you give it to your baby.

Cows' milk

Cows' milk doesn't contain enough iron and other nutrients to meet young babies' needs. That's why it shouldn't be given as a drink to babies until they are 12 months old. Whole milk should be given to children until they are two years old, as they need the extra energy and vitamins it contains.

Semi-skimmed milk can be introduced once your child is two years old, as long as they're a good eater and they have a varied diet. Skimmed and 1% milk aren't suitable for children under five, as they don't contain enough calories. Lower-fat milks can be used in cooking from the age of one though.

Unpasteurised milk

Young children shouldn't be given unpasteurised milk because of the higher risk of food poisoning.

Goats' and sheep's milk

These aren't suitable as drinks for babies under one as, like cows' milk, they don't contain enough iron and other nutrients babies this age need. As long as they're pasteurised, they can be used once your baby is one year old.

Soya drinks and other milk alternatives

You can give your child unsweetened calcium-fortified milk alternatives, such as soya, almond and oat drinks, from the age of one as part of a healthy balanced diet. Toddlers and young children under the age of five shouldn't be given rice drinks, because of the levels of arsenic in these products (see more below).

If your child has an allergy or intolerance to milk, talk to your health visitor or GP. They can advise you on suitable milk alternatives.

Rice drinks

Children under five shouldn't have rice drinks as they may contain unsafe levels of arsenic. Arsenic is found naturally in the environment and can find its way into our food and water. Rice tends to take up more arsenic than other grains.

Don't worry if your child has already had rice drinks. There's no immediate risk to them, and there are unlikely to be any long-term harmful effects. But to avoid the possibility of them taking in any more arsenic, it's best to switch to a different kind of milk.

Fruit juice and smoothies

Fruit juices, such as orange juice, are a good source of vitamin C. However, they also contain natural sugars and acids, which can cause tooth decay.

Babies under six months old shouldn't be given fruit juices. Diluted fruit juice (one part juice to 10 parts water) can be given to children with their meals after six months. Giving fruit juice with mealtimes (rather than between) helps reduce the risk of tooth decay.

From age five, it's OK to give your child undiluted fruit juice or smoothies, but stick to no more than one glass (about 150ml) a day served with a meal.

Squashes, flavoured milk, 'fruit' or 'juice' drinks and fizzy drinks

These are not suitable for young babies. These drinks contain sugar and can cause tooth decay, even when diluted.

For older babies and toddlers, these drinks can lead to poor appetite, poor weight gain and, in toddlers, diarrhoea. Even drinks that have artificial sweeteners can encourage children to develop a sweet tooth.

Watch out for drinks that say 'fruit' or 'juice' drink on the pack. These probably won't count towards your child's [5 A DAY](#) and can be high in sugar.

Fizzy drinks are acidic and can damage tooth enamel so they shouldn't be given to babies and toddlers.

Diet or reduced-sugar drinks aren't recommended for babies and toddlers.

'Baby' and herbal drinks

These usually contain sugars and are not recommended.

Hot drinks

Tea and coffee aren't suitable for babies or young children. They can reduce the amount of iron absorbed from food, especially if they're given with meals. If sugar is added, this can lead to tooth decay.

Source:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/Pages/drinks-and-cups-children.aspx#close>