

# Infant formula 101: How to make the best choice for baby

Parenthood brings on a myriad of choices. Mom and Dad need to decide on a name, sleeping arrangements and parenting methods, just to name a few. But for many parents, one of the most daunting choices to make is selecting the right formula to meet their little one's nutritional needs.

Although many new mothers decide to breast-feed, some find formula feeding is the best or only option. The infant nutrition aisle at your local grocer has an array of formula choices in nearly every size, color and brand — how can a parent pick the right one?

According to experts, parents can rest assured that all infant formulas sold in the United States are governed by the Infant Formula Act, a law stating that infant formulas have to meet specific nutritional requirements to ensure infants are getting the nutrients needed for growth and development. A few key tips can help parents choose the formula that best meets the need of their growing infant.

## Pick a protein

One big difference among infant formulas is the type of protein used. Milk-based formulas have milk-protein, and the soy-based formulas get their protein from soy. There also can be differences in the fat, protein or carbohydrate sources and levels between varieties. Most formula-fed infants are fine to start out on milk-based formulas.

## Do name-brands provide benefits?

All of the generic store-brand formulas are made by



## Is your child hungry?

- Newborn babies will have clenched hands when they are hungry. Their hands will relax as they become full.
- Infants should eat every two to three hours.
- Spitting up after feeding usually means the infant is consuming too much in one feeding.
- If your child falls asleep while eating, he or she probably has had enough.
- Crying can be a good indicator of hunger, but make sure to check the little one's diaper and body temperature to determine if the cry is hunger-related.

the same manufacturer. The difference between these and their name-brand counterparts is that name-brand formulas usually provide more cutting-edge nutrition, like supplementing their formula with DHA. Generic brands eventually catch up and follow suit with the new-found nutritional additions, making them just as good. Bottom line: generic formulas are fine to use.

## DHA supplements are smart

Many infant formulas are supplemented with DHA, a type of omega 3 fat that's important in brain and nervous system development, as well as assisting

with visual processing. DHA has been shown to be especially helpful to premature infants and may be important for the full-term infant. Since it is naturally found in breast milk, formula companies have noted its importance and have started adding it to their product. Most formulas now contain DHA, but it is often labeled in different ways. Read the labels carefully to be sure.

## Powder vs. liquid

Generally, liquid formulas are more expensive but offer the convenience of being ready-to-feed and they also eliminate mixing errors. Concentrated liquid formulas are also available, but

will need to be diluted. All liquid formulas must be refrigerated after opening and ready-to-feed liquids should never be diluted with water. Powder formula is usually cheaper and easier to carry, along with water for mixing. It's also important that powder-based formula is mixed well so the infant receives all the nutrition available. Both liquid and powder-based formulas that are in a bottle, ready to feed, should be refrigerated.

Nutritional experts from **Nationwide Children's Hospital** provided the information for this column.