

Parent Information Sheet for Formula Supplementation of the Breastfed Infant

The Canadian Pediatric Society, Health Canada, the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend that **feeding only breast milk for the first six months of life provides the best food for the healthy growth and development of your baby.**

Advantages of exclusive breastfeeding (feeding breast milk only)

- Breast milk is easily digested, always clean and the right temperature.
- Breastfeeding your baby a minimum of 8 feeds or more in 24hrs according to his/her feeding cues encourages more milk production. This helps baby gain weight better, may decrease the chance of jaundice and prevent engorgement for the mother.
- Exclusive breastfeeding may decrease the baby's risk of asthma, ear infections, bowel infections, obesity, heart disease, diabetes, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and some childhood cancers.

Why should a breastfed baby not be given a formula supplement unless it is medically necessary?

- Formula can decrease the healthy bacteria in the intestines that help to protect your baby against infections.
- Formula is slower to digest than breast milk and stays in the stomach longer than breast milk. This discourages your baby from feeding often at your breast and may result in decreased milk supply.

When may a breastfed baby need formula supplementation? (formula feedings with or in place of breastfeeding) For a healthy, full term, breast feeding newborn, formula is used as a medication to treat a medical concern.

Medical reasons for formula supplementation¹

- Low blood sugar which does not improve with increased breastfeeding or by being given breast milk
- Significant dehydration not corrected with increased breastfeeding or breast milk
- The mother is ill and/or separated from her baby
- Baby is jaundiced and unable to breastfeed well
- Mother's medication that is not safe for her breastfeeding baby
- Preterm or severely ill baby that is unable to breastfeed well or meet all nutritional needs from only breast milk
- Other medical indications – as per physician's order

How can this formula be given to my baby?

Using a lactation aid at the breast, cup, spoon, syringe or finger feeding would all be preferred options of giving the supplementation. These methods interfere the least with breastfeeding. A bottle would be the last option as this has the greatest potential to affect a positive return to breastfeeding.

Returning to exclusive breastfeeding as soon as possible will help you and your baby have a positive breastfeeding experience. Talk to your health care provider for ongoing support.

¹Adapted from WHO/UNICEF 2009