



Breastfeeding vs. formula feeding

The benefits and challenges

For moms-to-be, the decision to breastfeed or formula feed is based on comfort level, lifestyle, and specific medical conditions.

Breastfeeding

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends babies breastfeed exclusively for the first six months, and supports continued breastfeeding once solid foods are introduced.

Benefits

Fighting infections and other conditions

During breastfeeding, antibodies and other germ-fighting factors are passed from mother to baby, strengthening the baby's immune system. This can lower the incidence of ear infections, respiratory infections, meningitis, and can protect against allergies, asthma, diabetes, obesity, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Nutrition and ease of digestion

Breast milk's components—lactose, protein (whey and casein), and fat—are easily digested, which leads to fewer bouts of diarrhea or constipation.

Because breast milk lacks sufficient vitamin D, the AAP recommends that breastfed babies receive it as a supplement for the first two months, and continue to supplement if needed.

Breast milk is free

Unless you are pumping breast milk and giving it your baby, there is no need for bottles and other costly supplies. Also, breastfed babies are less likely to be sick, potentially lowering your medical bills.

Convenience

Breast milk is naturally available, making travel planning easier.

Skin-to-skin contact

Many parents enjoy the bonding experience of skin-to-skin contact with their babies during feedings.

Beneficial for mothers

Studies show breastfeeding helps lower the risk of breast cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, and may help decrease the risk of uterine and ovarian cancer. It can also burn calories, and help the uterus return to its prepregnancy size.

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Breastfeeding challenges

Common concerns of new moms, especially during the first few weeks and months, may include personal comfort, latch pain, time and frequency of feedings, and diet.

Maternal medical conditions, medications, and breast surgery

Medical conditions, such as HIV or AIDS, those involving chemotherapy, or certain medications or herbs you take, can make breastfeeding unsafe. Check with your provider or a lactation consultant if you are unsure if you should breastfeed in relation to a specific condition.

If you have had breast surgery, such as reduction or implants, you may have difficulty with your milk supply if your milk ducts have been severed.

Formula feeding

Commercial formulas can be healthy alternatives to breast milk, and may contain vitamins and nutrients not found in breast milk. They are manufactured under sterile conditions, replicating breast milk using a combination of proteins, sugars, fats, and vitamins.

Benefits

Convenience and flexibility

Either parent (or another caregiver) can feed the baby a bottle at any time. This provides moms the option and flexibility to share the feeding duties, and can help their partner to feel more bonded.

Skin-to-skin contact

Many parents enjoy the bonding experience of close contact with their babies during feedings.

Time and frequency of feedings

Formula is less digestible than breast milk, so formula-fed babies often feel full and tend to eat less.

Diet

Mothers who formula feed do not have to worry about what they eat or drink affecting their baby.

Formula feeding challenges

Lack of antibodies

Formula does not contain the antibodies found in breast milk, and can't provide a baby with this added protection against infection and illness.

Planning and organization

Formula feeding your baby requires planning and organization. Parents must buy formula and make sure the necessary supplies (like bottles and nipples) are clean, easily accessible, and ready to go. Eight to ten feedings in a 24-hour period can be overwhelming if you're unprepared.

Expense

Formula can be costly. Powdered formula is the least expensive, followed by concentrated, with ready-to-feed being the most expensive. Specialty formulas (soy and hypoallergenic) cost far more than the basic formulas. During the first year of life, the cost of basic formula can run \$1,500 or more.

Gas and constipation

Babies who are formula-fed tend to have more gas and firmer bowel movements than breastfed babies.

What works best for you?

Decisions about how you will feed your baby can be difficult. Many moms decide to breastfeed, and supplement with formula because they find it is best for their family and their lifestyle.

However you decide to feed your baby—breast milk, formula, or a combination of both—the most important thing is that your baby is well-fed, well cared for, and loved.