

Switching milk formulae for babies

1. Will it affect my baby's health if I switch to another brand?

Standard infant formula milk is essentially cow milk -based and manufactured with reference to the nutritional content of breast milk. As manufacturers have to adhere to international or national standards for infant formulae, they are very similar in composition.

In general, healthcare professionals would not recommend parents to switch their babies to another brand for minor problems. Yet, if there are genuine needs, switching to another brand should not affect babies' health.

It is, however, important that parents ought to choose the appropriate formulae for their babies. Specifically, for children-

a) from birth to 6 months -

For babies taking cow milk-based infant formula (for 0-6months), you can change directly to another brand of cow milk-based infant formula. However, you should not switch to high protein "follow-up formula" (for 6 months or above) as this will overload your babies' kidneys, leading to dehydration, gastroenteritis and even brain damages;

b) 6-12 months –

You can continue to feed your babies with infant formula (for 0-6months) or follow-on formula (for 6-12months).

At around 6 months, babies should start to take complementary foods. In the beginning, milk still remains as the main source of nutrients. However, when your children consume substantial amounts and varieties of other foods, the amount of milk intake can be decreased gradually. Regular cow's milk is not recommended for infants less than 1 year old;

c) 1 year or beyond –

By 1 year old, your children should be enjoying a balanced diet, with a good variety of solid foods that replaces milk as the main source of nutrients. Your children can drink whole (full-fat) milk, such as chilled pasteurized cow's milk or UHT milk;

d) on special formulae –

You should seek advice from attending doctors, nurses, midwives or dietitians.

2. How exactly should I change my baby to another brand of formula milk? Is there anything I need to pay special attention to?

Different brands of formula milk have different dilution methods. Therefore, it is definitely against recommendation for parents to mix two or more brands of milk powder when preparing one feed.

There is actually no fix rule on how to switch formula milk. The pace will depend on individual baby's acceptance. As the taste of different formulae does differ, it is not unexpected that some children may need more time to adapt. Parents can increase the number of feeds of the new brand gradually. If everything goes smoothly, you can adopt a faster pace until all feeds are replaced by the new brand.

Another piece of advice: Parents may notice a change in their children's bowel habits, whether in terms of frequency, texture and/or colour of the stool. This is accountable and acceptable as the amount of additives like iron, prebiotics, etc, does vary amongst the different brands. Do not over-worry and try to switch to a third brand. In fact, if children do not have allergy to the original cow milk-based formula, it is unlikely that they will develop allergy on switching to another cow milk-based formula.