

# Drinks

for children up to 5



This leaflet has information on the types of drinks to give to children up to five years. Breast fed babies do not need any additional drinks before 6 months. Formula fed babies may need some extra water in hot weather. Water needs to be boiled and cooled for babies below 6 months.

Drinks should be given in an open cup or free-flowing beaker. Do not use a cup with a valve, such as 'non-spill' beakers, or a bottle, since these encourage frequent sucking and can contribute to tooth damage.

Breast milk is still the best milk after introducing solids and there are many benefits of continuing breastfeeding for 2 years and beyond. Breastfed children will have less need to have other drinks.

- ☺ Encourage your child to drink water if she or he is thirsty. Water quenches thirst, does not spoil children's appetites, and does not damage teeth. In Britain, tap water from the first tap on the mains supply (usually the cold tap in the kitchen) is fine and better than bottled waters, which may have a high mineral content and therefore are unhealthy for your baby
- ☺ Encourage milk as a drink in a cup, if not breastfeeding. Full-fat cow's milk is suitable as a main drink for most children from 12 months of age. Semi-skimmed milk can be introduced after the age of 2 years, provided that the child is a good eater. If a child fills up on milk, she or he will eat less food, which can mean that they do not get enough iron. By 1 year children should not have more than 500-600ml (around 1 pint) of milk as a drink or in food. Breast milk and other milk is the main source of calcium and is a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals for young children. Skimmed milk is not suitable as the main drink for a child under 5 years of age

- 🍌 Fruit juice, if given, can be a useful source of vitamin C. Children should be encouraged to have a piece of fruit, or glass of diluted fruit juice, with their main meal or with breakfast as this helps the body to absorb iron. To dilute the juice, use one part fruit juice to at least 10 parts of water. It is better not to provide fruit juice in between snacks or in a bottle as it may cause tooth decay
- 🍌 Try not to let your child have any fizzy drinks, squashes, juice drinks, flavoured milk or flavoured water, even the diet or low sugar varieties. The sugar and acid in these drinks can cause tooth decay and it is not known whether artificial sweeteners are safe for small children. These drinks do not provide many nutrients and children who frequently drink them may not eat well at mealtimes
- 🍌 Baby and herbal drinks may contain sugar and are not recommended
- 🍌 Tea and coffee are not suitable for children under 5. They reduce iron absorption from food when taken with meals. A lack of iron may lead to health problems. Children's behaviour may also change when they have drinks containing caffeine



## Types of milk to give to children up to 5 as a main drink

**Breast milk** is the ideal food and drink for babies up to 6 months. Breast milk is the best milk after introducing solids and there are many benefits of continuing breast feeding for 2 years and beyond.

**Infant formula** is cow's milk modified for babies. If not breastfeeding, you can use it for babies up to 12 months. To make up a bottle, boil some fresh tap water and let it cool for only a few minutes (it should still be more than 70°C). Measure the exact amount of powder using the scoop provided in the tin (level scoop).



Add the powder to the water. All formulas in Britain now use 1 scoop to 1 oz (30ml) water. Never use more than this or you will make your baby ill. Do not add anything else to the feed. Screw the cap on tightly and shake well until all the powder has dissolved. Check the temperature of the feed by dripping a little on the inside of your wrist to check it is at body temperature before giving it. Make up only one feed at a time. (For more information visit: [www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4123619](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4123619))

**Follow-on infant formula** is modified cow's milk and is only suitable for babies from 6-12 months of age.

**Soya infant formula** is not recommended as a substitute for formula milk, unless you are advised to use it by a health professional. These formulas contain sugar, which is harmful to teeth.

**Full-fat cow's milk** is not suitable for children under 12 months as a main drink but can be used in food preparation after 6 months.

**Semi-skimmed cow's milk** is not suitable for children under 2 years as a drink, but can be introduced gradually after the age of 2, provided that the child is eating and growing well.

**Skimmed cow's milk**, including dried skimmed milk, should not be given to children under 5 years.

**Evaporated milk** is not suitable for babies. Skimmed milk varieties should not be given to children under 5 years.

**Condensed milk** should not be used for babies or children.

**Goat's milk** is not suitable for babies unless recommended by a paediatrician.

**Soya drinks** are not suitable for babies. If children over 1 are given soya drinks, make sure they are fortified with calcium. Drinks should be given in cups, rather than bottles, because of the sugar content.

**Cow's milk substitutes, such as oat milk, rice milk or almond milk** are not suitable for children under 5. These drinks are low in protein and may have added sugar. The drink will also be low in calcium if not fortified. Seek specialist advice from your GP, health visitor or dietitian.

**N.B. All cow's or goat's milk given to children should be pasteurised or long-life (UHT) to prevent any risk of infection, such as TB.**







Reference: Caroline Walker Trust: Eating well for under 5s in child care. Nutritional and practical guidelines. 2nd Edition ([www.cwt.org.uk](http://www.cwt.org.uk))

Photographs in this leaflet were taken at Rosedale Early Years Centre by Tessa Hallman and at Kate Greenaway Nursery School and Children's Centre by Lottie Davies.

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