



Question

How should we feed our baby if we're running low on money?



Steven A. Abrams, MD, FAAP

Answer

Lost jobs and business during the COVID-19 (/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx) outbreak has left many families struggling to pay for groceries, including infant formula. Food pantries and public support programs such as WIC and SNAP (/English/ages-stages/baby/Pages/Babys-First-1000-Days-AAP-Policy-Explained.aspx) are available, but may not cover everything a family needs to stay healthy. Also, families who find themselves suddenly in need may not qualify for some of these public support programs.



The AAP strongly believes that good nutrition is essential for a healthy future for infants and small children. Putting their needs first is critical, and there are ways to make this more affordable.

Here are some tips to help families struggling to afford infant formula:

- If your child is younger than 12 months of age, ask your pediatrician's office if they can urgently get you a small supply from the local formula representatives or a local charity. Some formula companies have patient assistance programs that your pediatrician can help you find. Your local WIC office (<http://signupwic.com/>) may also be able to help.
- If possible, buy formula online or in the largest sizes available at retail stores, and watch for sales. Remember to only buy formula from well-recognized distributors and pharmacies. Avoid formula sold by individuals or on auction sites.
- For most babies, it is OK to switch between different milk-based formulas, including store brands, unless your baby is on a specific, highly hydrolyzed one such as Alimentum or Nutramigen. If you are unsure, talk with your pediatrician.
- **Never water down** (/English/ages-stages/baby/formula-feeding/Pages/how-to-safely-prepare-formula-with-water.aspx) **formula!** Always follow label instructions or those given to you by your pediatrician. Watering down formula is dangerous and can cause nutritional imbalances in your baby and lead to serious health problems.

Can I give my baby alternative milk products if I can't afford infant formula?

Whole cow's milk and dairy alternatives are not recommended for infants under 12 months of age. It is best to stick to breast milk and/or infant formula throughout your baby's first year, except in a very brief emergency. Food banks, local WIC offices, and other community resources are usually able to help in a food emergency. Keep in mind that eligibility for public support programs like WIC and SNAP may change, so keep in contact with these agencies to make sure you can participate.

Toddler formulas are not necessary for infants over 12 months of age. Cow's milk or fortified soy milk products are less expensive than formula, meet a toddler's need for milk products, and provide adequate minerals and protein.

Can I make my baby's food myself?

The AAP strongly advises against homemade formula (</English/ages-stages/baby/formula-feeding/Pages/Is-Homemade-Baby-Formula-Safe.aspx>). Although recipes for homemade formulas circulating on the internet may seem healthy and less expensive, they may not be safe and do not meet your baby's nutritional needs.

However, you can make your own baby food when you start your baby on solids (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Starting-Solid-Foods.aspx>), at about 6 months of age. There is no need to rely upon pre-made baby food that may be more expensive. If you make your own baby food (</English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Tips-for-Introducing-Solid-Foods.aspx>), be sure you include enough protein (</English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/Beyond-Chicken-Nuggets.aspx>) and iron, two key nutrients for your child's growth. Also do not give honey (</English/health-issues/conditions/infections/Pages/Botulism.aspx>) to an infant under 1 year of age and avoid foods that are choking hazards (</English/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/Pages/Choking-Prevention.aspx>).

Remember

Your pediatrician cares about your child's health and is available even during the COVID-19 outbreak. Always feel free to talk with your pediatrician about any concerns you have with feeding your baby.

More Information:

(</English/ages-stages/baby/formula-feeding/Pages/Formula-Buying-Tips.aspx>) (</English/ages-stages/baby/formula-feeding/Pages/Formula-Buying-Tips.aspx>)

- Formula Buying Tips (</English/ages-stages/baby/formula-feeding/Pages/Formula-Buying-Tips.aspx>)
- How to Safely Prepare Formula with Water (</English/ages-stages/baby/formula-feeding/Pages/how-to-safely-prepare-formula-with-water.aspx>)
- Is Homemade Baby Formula Safe? (</English/ages-stages/baby/formula-feeding/Pages/Is-Homemade-Baby-Formula-Safe.aspx>)



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