

## What to do during the formula shortage

With more than 40% of formulas out of stock in stores across the country, parents are facing the grueling task of going to extreme lengths to feed their children. As the nation faces this crisis, there are things you need to know about finding formula to feed your child during this shortage. The first thing to know is that it is unsafe to make baby formula yourself. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, it is unsafe to make homemade formula. Babies need specific nutrients to grow and although you can include items with those nutrients in a formula, it can be unsafe for their health to drink homemade formula. Pediatricians warn that it can cause severe dehydration, diarrhea, and even vomiting (USDA, 2022). The second thing to know is that diluting formula can also cause issues with growth and health. The kidneys of infants process differently than an older child, and diluting formula may cause issues with infant kidney health (USDA, 2022). The third thing to know is that it is unsafe to feed an infant cow's milk until they are 12 months in age, and even then, make sure the milk is whole or reduced fat milk. This is again because of the protein and nutrient content found in cow's milk that can put stress on your child's kidneys. Additional reasons are that it can cause iron deficiency and that cow's milk lacks the healthiest types of fat needed for babies to grow. It is also unsafe to use goat's milk, or plant-based milk for infants (Healthy Children, 2022).

Now that you know what not to do, here is what you can do.

1. Switch out brands of formula. It is generally safe to switch out brands, as long as the formula is FDA approved.
2. Buy formula online. If you do this you need to ensure that you buy ONLY from sites that sell FDA approved formula and never purchase formula from overseas, as these are not regulated by the FDA and can cause some of the issues listed above.
3. Check with smaller chain stores, drug stores, and even some gas stations which sell products. These stores may not be as "picked over" and you may have a better option for finding formula.
4. Utilize social media to help you find the formula you need. Reach out via Facebook groups, messenger and your social media status to ask friends and family to keep a look out for formula when they visit stores.
5. Use websites like <https://freeformula.exchange/> to find a match for someone who has extra formula and is looking to donate it.
6. Use breastmilk donors, but always consult your pediatrician first to understand the risks such as exposure to infectious diseases, chemical contaminants and more.
7. If your child is over 6 months old, talk to your pediatrician about adding in complementary foods. This can help supplement their diets and can be helpful during a shortage.

For more information on how to safely feed your baby during the formula shortage, you can visit: <https://healthychildren.org> This site has many different options and information, vetted by real pediatricians, which can answer your questions about formula, using donor milk, and more. You can also visit CDC.gov and search for formula to find information about nutrition, possible substitutions, appropriate ages for formulas and more.