

Supplementing Human Milk for Term Infants Experiencing Growth Failure



Importance of Human Milk

Human Milk is the Best Form of Nutrition for Most Infants¹

- Offers disease protection for infants, as antibodies are shared from mother to infant.
- Helps reduce risk of some maternal diseases.
- Breastfeeding is not always possible.

Breastfeeding Recommendations²⁻⁴

- Exclusively breastfeed through 6 months of age.
- Continue breastfeeding as primary source of nutrition through 12 months while introducing solid foods.
- Consider supplementary breastfeeding beyond one year of age along with foods as long as desired between mother and child.

Techniques and Tips When the Breastfed Infant is Not Gaining Weight

Common Breastfeeding Challenges⁵

- Mother may have hesitation or fears about breastfeeding.
- Mother may have sore nipples if infant has a poor latch or inability to form a seal on the nipple.
- Mother may experience under or oversupply of milk, exhaustion, swelling of breasts, or infection.
- Infant may have health issues impacting breastfeeding or might be in the NICU which can lead to stress on all family members.
- Infant may have trouble swallowing or forming a seal on the nipple.

Tips for overcoming challenges when infant is not gaining weight⁶

- Caregivers, especially breastfeeding mothers, need support.
- Talk with your infant's primary care doctor for a referral to a pediatric dietitian and/or lactation counselor.
- Utilize pumping to increase human milk production and retrieve as much human milk as possible; pump and provide through the bottle or pump and freeze the milk to use at a later date.
- Try smaller, more frequent feeds with maximum 20-minute feed time; to begin, goal is every 2–3 hours around the clock for the younger infant (for example, 8–12 feedings per day).
- Utilize alternative breastfeeding tools and techniques, as recommended by a lactation specialist, such as a nipple everter/shield and other breast milk collectors.

When to Start Supplementing Formula with Human Milk

There are instances where breastfeeding is not adequate, and with the help from your healthcare team, supplemental nutrition with formula can be started.

Infant Indications for Supplementation⁶

- Poor weight or length gain in infant
- Weight loss
- Signs and symptoms of dehydration
- Infant with fluid restrictions

Maternal Indications for Supplementation⁶

- Inadequate milk production
- Stopping of breastfeeding due to certain medications
- Temporary separation of mother and baby without human milk available
- Intolerable pain during feedings unrelieved by interventions

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Benefits to Supplementation⁷

A recent large study showed that when infants with poor growth on breastfeeding alone received supplemental formula, they had improved energy intake and growth.

Ways to Supplement

As parents and/or caregivers, you should consult the infant's healthcare provider or dietitian before providing supplemental formula. They will advise on the best way to increase the infants' calories.

There are ways to increase the total calories to promote better growth. Here are a few examples on how this may be done.

- Add infant formula to human milk and deliver via bottle. Your healthcare provider can determine what is best for your infant and show you how to do this.
- Continue breastfeeding and follow up with some formula by bottle. Consult with your healthcare provider to determine if the formula should be specially prepared to increase the calories higher than the standard 20 calorie per ounce.
- If directed by your healthcare provider, use an energy and nutrient dense, ready-to-feed formula, especially if daily formula volume needs to be limited.
- Use a 24–30 calorie per ounce formula with high protein and nutrient content that is nutritionally complete. This allows for less volume of the supplemental formula to provide needed nutrition.



References:

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5. Office on Women's Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Common breastfeeding challenges. <https://wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/common-breastfeeding-challenges>
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Note: This information is for use by healthcare professionals to teach parents/caregivers. Use of this sheet does not in any way guarantee any specific benefit in outcome or survival. The professional judgment of the attending health professionals is the primary component of quality medical care delivery. Since this information cannot account for every variation in circumstances, practitioners must always exercise professional judgment when applying these recommendations to individual patients. This sheet is intended to supplement, but not replace, professional training and judgment.

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Nutricia North America supports the use of human milk whenever possible.