

## IN THE NEWS: INFANT FEEDING CHOICES

Media coverage on infant feeding choices does not always address the following important facts.

- **Breastfeeding rates have increased:** The infant formula industry agrees with the AAP and other leading medical organizations that breast milk is the best form of infant nutrition. Infant formula is not in competition with breast milk—the gold standard of infant nutrition. Industry strongly supports the positive, accurate promotion of breastfeeding and is pleased that, through a concerted effort by the health community, government and industry, recorded breastfeeding rates in the United States are the highest they have been in over 30 years.<sup>7</sup>
- **Infant formula is safe:** Infant formula is the only safe, nutritious and recommended alternative to breast milk, a fact supported by both the AAP and the U.S. government. Infant formula was developed to address a critical need for a safe and nutritious alternative when breast milk is not available OR when not chosen — and every mother should have that right to choose, based on accurate, objective information on infant feeding options.
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) supports infant formula use for women who cannot or chose not to breastfeed:** Upon introducing their Breastfeeding Awareness Campaign, HHS made this statement: “HHS strongly recommends and encourages women to breastfeed exclusively for six months. But it understands that there are mothers who are unable to breastfeed or shouldn’t breastfeed. Infant formula is safe and nutritious for those women who are not able to breastfeed. In fact, the federal government is a large distributor of infant formula through various programs, such as the Women, Infants, and Children program.” (Note: over 50% of infants in the U.S. receive formula from the government through the WIC program.)
- **Disease Claims:** Statements that breastfeeding prevents disease or that formula feeding increases the risk of diseases are misleading and lack scientific support; the data in many cases are inconclusive.

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Furthermore, claims regarding potential detrimental health effects due to the absence of breast milk (and, by implication, the use of infant formula) are likely to cause unjustified worry among mothers who may formula-feed their infants. A study showing a *decreased* risk for certain illnesses/diseases from breastfeeding does not necessarily translate to an *increased* risk from infant formula.

- **Warning labels:** While not required, infant formula product labels, and related educational materials, state that breast milk is recommended. Also, there is no requirement for any type of “warning statement” on infant formula products, nor is there a need for such a warning on a food product that is safe when prepared according to instructions. To ensure the safety and effectiveness of all infant formula, the FDA regulates the levels of essential nutrients in formulas through the IFA of 1980 and subsequent amendments of 1986.<sup>5</sup> The FDA also regulates directions for infant formula preparation, labeling, and many aspects of product claims.

- 1 The American Academy of Pediatrics. Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk. *Pediatrics*. 2005; 115:496-506.
- 2 The American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Nutrition. Iron Fortification of Infant Formula. *Pediatrics*. 1999;104:119-123.
- 3 Fairbank, Maslin, Maulin & Associates with Wirthlin Worldwide. National Public Opinion Infant Feeding Survey. August 2002.
- 4 The American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Nutrition. Iron Fortification of Infant Formula. *Pediatrics*. 1999;104:119-123.
- 5 The Infant Formula Act of 1980. Public Law No. 96-359, 94 Stat. 1190 [codified at 21 U.S.C. §350(a), 301, 321 (aa), 331, 374(a)]. September 26, 1980.
- 6 Mothers Survey, Ross Products Division, Abbott, Columbus, OH, 2001.
- 7 The American Academy of Pediatrics, Section on Breastfeeding. Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk. *Pediatrics*. 2005;115:496-506.

**For more information on infant feeding and infant nutrition, please visit [www.infantformula.org](http://www.infantformula.org).**

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**IFC**  
International  
Formula Council



**WHAT MOTHERS  
SHOULD KNOW ABOUT  
INFANT FORMULA**

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## IRON-FORTIFIED INFANT FORMULA IS THE ONLY RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE IF AN INFANT IS NOT BREASTFED.

Breast milk is the best form of infant nutrition. The infant formula industry strongly supports the positive, accurate promotion of breastfeeding and is pleased that, through a concerted effort by the health community, government and industry, recorded breastfeeding rates in the United States are the highest they have been in over 30 years.

Labels on infant formulas and information provided by formula companies clearly state that breastfeeding is preferred. However, if an infant is not breastfed for whatever reason, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all infants weaned before 12 months of age should receive iron-fortified infant formula.<sup>1</sup> Iron-fortified infant formula is the only safe and effective alternative to breast milk, providing complete nutrition to meet the unique needs of growing infants.

Iron-deficiency anemia, a potential nutritional deficiency in infants, was once common among infants fed cow's milk. According to the AAP Committee on Nutrition (CON), "The use of iron-fortified formulas has dramatically reduced the rate of iron-deficiency anemia during infancy in the last 25 years."<sup>2</sup> In large part this is due to the provision of iron-fortified formula through the federal government's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The U.S. government currently makes free infant formula available to about half of the infants born annually in the U.S. through the WIC program, which serves some of the most vulnerable infants at nutritional risk in the country. *(More about iron fortification of infant formula is available at [www.infantformula.org](http://www.infantformula.org) as well as an "Infant Feeding and Nutrition" brochure.)*



## MOTHERS KNOW BREASTFEEDING IS BEST. AT THE SAME TIME THEY WANT A CHOICE.

A mother's decision about how she feeds her baby is very personal. The number one reason that women choose breastfeeding is to take advantage of its health benefits for their babies. While breastfeeding is the optimal form of infant feeding and should be encouraged, it is not the only feeding option available. It is every mother's right to choose the best feeding option for her baby and herself, given her particular life circumstances.

### According to a national public opinion poll:<sup>3</sup>

- 82% identify breastfeeding as the healthiest choice for themselves and their babies
- Two-thirds believe that the government should trust women to make the best infant feeding choice for themselves and their babies
- Mothers cite medical reasons and going back to work as the most important reasons a mother would choose not to breastfeed.

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## INFANT FORMULA IS A NECESSARY AND NUTRITIOUS PRODUCT.

The need for breast milk alternatives is centuries old. Infant formula was developed to meet this need and is the only safe and nutritious alternative to breast milk.

Today, nearly 70% of all babies born in the United States are breastfed at birth. And, while more must be done to further encourage and support breastfeeding, infant formula remains the only safe and nutritious alternative to breast milk that is proven to help infants grow and develop into healthy children. Decades of research and dedication to nutrition science have led to this achievement and to important breakthroughs in specialized infant formulas that provide premature babies, and babies with challenging nutritional problems, the sustenance to survive, and thrive. The critical health risk in infant feeding arises when neither breast milk nor infant formula is chosen. For example, cow's milk (whole, 2%, 1%, ½%, or skim) is not appropriate for children under the age of one year, according to the AAP Committee on Nutrition (CON). Whole cow's milk is a poor source of iron, vitamin C, vitamin E, and copper, and can cause gastrointestinal bleeding in young infants. For these reasons, the CON recommends that breastfeeding or iron-fortified infant formula be continued during the first year of life.<sup>4</sup>



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## INFANT FORMULA IS SAFE AND IS HIGHLY REGULATED.

Because infant formula is the primary source of nutrition for millions of infants, the industry, working closely with the government, has set very high standards for infant formula production. As a result, infant formula is one of the most highly regulated food products in the U.S.

To ensure the safety and effectiveness of all infant formulas, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates the levels of essential nutrients in formulas through the U.S. Infant Formula Act (IFA) of 1980 and subsequent amendments of 1986.<sup>5</sup> The FDA also regulates directions for infant formula preparation, labeling, and many aspects of product claims.

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## THE WORKPLACE IS THE MAJOR BARRIER TO INCREASING BREASTFEEDING RATES IN THE U.S.

Efforts to increase breastfeeding rates would be best served by addressing a major barrier to breastfeeding in the U.S. — the lack of workplace support programs. Research indicates that returning to work is one of the most common reasons women stop breastfeeding. Data show that women who work full-time start breastfeeding at virtually the same rate as all mothers, but by the time their infants are six months old, breastfeeding rates for full-time working moms are significantly lower.<sup>6</sup> Providing workplace support for women who wish to continue to breastfeed will have a significant impact on breastfeeding duration rates.