

New research reveals mothers need infant feeding information

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A systematic literature review of mothers' experiences with bottle-feeding found that while mothers recognize the benefits of breastfeeding, those who bottle-feed with infant formula do not receive adequate information and support from their healthcare providers and thus, ultimately put their baby's health at risk. "While it is important to promote breastfeeding," the authors conclude, "it is also necessary to ensure that the needs of bottle-feeding mothers are not overlooked."

To help meet this need, the International Formula Council* (IFC) provides helpful online resources, including video and print information that review the basics of safe infant formula preparation (available through the www.infantformula.org website). "One of our goals as an association is to help parents make informed infant feeding choices. Infant formula manufacturers have long provided their own brand-specific information on infant formula labels and websites. Our online tools build on these resources and offer parents practical tips that help them prepare and store infant formula appropriately," said Mardi Mountford, IFC Executive Vice President. .

The literature review - the first of its kind - appears in the July 2009 *Archives of Disease in Childhood*, a publication of the peer-reviewed *British Medical Journal*, and was conducted by researchers at the University of Cambridge. A major finding of the review, which examined 23 studies (seven from the United States, 14 from the United Kingdom, one from New Zealand, and one from Australia) with over 13,000 participants, was that [mothers](#) who did not receive bottle-feeding

information from their healthcare providers often turned to family and friends for [guidance](#) - a trend which can perpetuate errors in infant formula preparation and handling.

Infant formula manufacturers are required by law to provide clear and explicit information about the proper mixing, handling and storage of their products. But mothers also need to have that information reinforced by members of the healthcare community, to ensure the instructions are understood. The researchers discovered that without appropriate education, mothers may be making mistakes. "Such errors and other variations in formula-feeding may have both short- and long-term health consequences," the study authors report. The researchers also note that despite differences among the studies, a common thread remained throughout - mothers who bottle-fed their infants were riddled with negative feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and failure.

As Lillian Beard, MD, a practicing pediatrician for more than 30 years, can attest, "While breastfeeding should be encouraged, it is not the only safe and nutritious infant feeding option available. Healthcare providers should counsel new moms with information on all infant feeding options in order to ensure the health of their babies as well as support mothers in their decision."

The findings by the UK researchers coincide with those seen recently in the United States:

- Last year, a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) found that 77 percent of mothers did not receive information on infant formula preparation from their healthcare provider.

- Last month, a national U.S. survey on infant feeding found that 78 percent of mothers believe new moms should receive information on breastfeeding and other feeding options so they can make an informed choice and mothers should not have the information they receive restricted. In the same poll, mothers said that above all, they want information, flexibility and choice when it comes to infant feeding decisions.

According to another CDC study, nearly 80 percent of all babies born in the U.S. are breastfed at birth. Yet, for those mothers who cannot or choose not to breastfeed, research shows these mothers not only want information on bottle-feeding, but are in great need of education to ensure optimal health for their infants.

"As a health professional, I am committed to breastfeeding and the incomparable value of mother's milk for her infant," adds Dr. Beard. "However, in instances where breast milk is not available, infant formula remains the only safe and nutritious alternative to promote the infants' healthy growth and development. We in the healthcare community have a responsibility to provide information to ensure that parents who choose to give formula to their babies understand and appreciate the importance of safe preparation, handling, and storage of all [infant formula](#)."

More information: R. Lakshman, D Ogilvie, K K Ong, "Mothers experience of bottle-feeding: a systematic review of qualitative and quantitative studies." Archives of Disease in Childhood, published by the [British Medical Journal](#) Publishing Group, 2009;94:596-601 ([Abstract](#))

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