

# Ask the Pediatrician: What can parents do about baby formula shortage?

May 9 2022, by Dr. Steven A. Abrams

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**Q:** There's been a shortage of baby formula at the grocery stores and I'm starting to worry about running out. What can I do?

**A:** Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there have been significant

shortages of infant formulas in some stores. Current shortages have been largely caused by supply chain issues and a recall of several contaminated formula products.

To help ease the impact of shortages, the American Academy of Pediatrics advises buying no more than a 10-day to two-week supply of formula. This will help everyone. Some stores are limiting purchases to prevent formula from running out.

If you're struggling to find [baby formula](#), here are some tips that can help. Keep in mind, this advice is for urgent situations. If you have any concerns about your baby's nutrition, please talk with your pediatrician.

- Ask your pediatrician if they are able to get you a can from a local formula representative or a charitable organization that has some. Your local WIC office or food pantry may also be able to help.
- Check smaller stores and drug stores, which may not be out of supply when the bigger stores are.
- If you can afford it, buy formula online until store shortages ease. Purchase from well-recognized distributors and pharmacies rather than individually sold or auction sites. Do not import formula from overseas as these are not FDA reviewed.
- For most babies, it is OK to switch to any available formula, including store brands, unless your baby is on a specific extensively hydrolyzed or amino acid-based formula, such as Elecare (no store brand exists). If you are unsure, talk with your pediatrician.
- Check social media groups. There are groups dedicated to [infant feeding](#) and formula, and members may have ideas for you on where to find formula. Make sure to check any advice with your pediatrician.
- If no formula can be found, consider borrowing a can from a

friend.

You may be tempted to [water](#) down formula to stretch it out, but you should never do that. Always follow label instructions or those given to you by your pediatrician. Watering down formula is dangerous. It can cause nutritional imbalances in your baby and lead to serious health problems. Always mix formula as directed by the manufacturer.

Water used for mixing infant formula must be from a safe water source, as defined by your state or local health department. If advised by your pediatrician or if you are concerned about your tap water, you can use [bottled water](#) or bring cold [tap water](#) to a rolling boil for 1 minute (no longer), then cool the water to [room temperature](#) for no more than 30 minutes before it is used.

The AAP strongly advises against homemade formula. Although recipes for homemade formulas circulating on the internet may seem healthy or less expensive, they are not safe and do not meet your baby's nutritional needs. Deaths have been reported from the use of some homemade formulas.

Milk alternatives are not recommended for infants under one year of age. Be especially careful to avoid almond or other plant milks as these are often low in protein and minerals.

Toddler formulas are not recommended for infants, but if you have no other choice, toddler formula is safe for a few days for babies close to a year of age.

Remember to check the "use by" date on infant formulas. Until that date, the infant [formula](#) will contain no less than the amount of each nutrient on the product label and will otherwise be of acceptable quality, the FDA notes. The "use by" date is required by FDA regulations on each

container of [infant formula](#).

Always talk with your [pediatrician](#) about any concerns you have about feeding your baby.

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