

Ask the Pediatrician: How do I know these unfamiliar brands of infant formula on store shelves are safe?

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Q: Why am I seeing brands of baby formula I've never heard of, and are they safe?

A: To help ease the national shortage of baby formula, the United States government is importing several brands that weren't previously sold here. If you see them in your [grocery store](#) or pharmacy, then they have been imported based on special regulations and review to make sure they meet safety and nutritional standards.

They are all brands widely used in Europe and Australia among other places with demonstrated safety.

Here are some other common questions that consumers have now:

How do these imported baby formulas compare to the brands I am used to seeing?

Many of the imported baby formulas will be very similar. But there are some that will be unique in the U.S. market, such as brands made from goat's milk protein. Some of the imported baby formulas are certified as organic; others are not. All should be labeled in English, though instructions for mixing them may use different standards of measurements, such as milliliters rather than ounces.

Are there any other differences in imported baby formulas?

There are several key differences to look for in these new imported formulas. First, you may see on the label "Stage 1" or "Stage 2." Stage 1 formulas are intended for babies in the first 6 months after birth, but generally can be used throughout the first year. Stage 2 formulas are meant for babies over 6 months of age.

Also, if you look at the labels, you may see some differences with typical American formulas. For example, the [iron content](#) is usually lower in

imported formulas. This is because the rules in Europe and Australia for iron are different than in the U.S. However, there is plenty of iron in these formulas, and you do not need to use an iron supplement unless advised by your pediatrician.

Goat's milk baby formula? Is that OK for an infant?

Yes, European and other international authorities have thoroughly reviewed the nutritional content of goat's milk. They've found that, when adapted for baby formula, goat's milk protein supports normal growth and development in infants. Some people believe that it may be tolerated better than formula based on cow milk or soy protein, with less upset stomachs or allergic responses, but that's not certain. However, raw goat's milk, like raw cow's milk, is not safe to feed a baby.

How do I mix imported baby formulas?

As with all baby formulas, read the label closely and follow the instructions exactly unless advised otherwise by your pediatrician. Most countries tell you the amount of water to add in "mls," which means milliliters. If your baby bottles don't have ml scale markings, you may have to convert from ounces to milliliters.

Remember that 30 mls is one ounce. Some of the formulas will have you mix one scoop for each two ounces (60 mls) of water, while others will have you mix one scoop for each one ounce (30 ml) of water. Be sure to use the scoop that came with the container of baby formula you are using.

Also note that the imported baby formula's instructions may refer to the bottle's nipple as the "teat."

As prepared, the imported baby formulas will have about the same amount of calories per serving as the usual U.S. formulas. If you have any questions about preparing the imported baby formula, be sure to talk with your pediatrician. Too much or too little water used with powder or concentrate is dangerous for your baby.

Can I just import baby formula on my own?

Do not try to import yourself directly, because you can't be sure it meets U.S. safety standards. Rely on what has gone through the special government approval process. Contact your pediatrician if you are unsure if a formula has been properly imported.

How long will imported baby formulas be on the shelves in the U.S.?

The special program allowing these importations lasts until November 2022. However, it is not known if it will be extended. Also, some of these formulas may stay in the U.S. marketplace after that time if the FDA and the company agree to this based on usual FDA regulations.

Can I get these imported baby formulas with my WIC benefits?

Some, but not all, of these imported baby formulas are available to WIC clients, although this is determined by state. Check with your state WIC website or office.

Are any specialty baby formulas for infants with special needs being imported?

Yes, some of the baby [formula](#) being imported under FDA oversight are designed for highly allergic babies. Additional supplies of formulas designed for infants born prematurely are scheduled to be imported soon.

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