

Pediatrician offers advice on 'toddler formula'

December 22 2023, by George Fuchs III, FAAP, American Academy of Pediatrics



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The formula aisle at your local supermarket has expanded in the past few years. Next to infant formula products you will often see products

labeled specifically for older babies and toddlers. The products have names like, "follow-up formula," "weaning formula," "toddler milk" or "toddler formula." These names are misleading, because the products are not a necessary part of a healthy child's diet or equivalent to infant formula in any way. Some are labeled with unproven health claims.

Special drinks for toddlers are not needed to meet your child's nutritional needs. They often have added sugar or salt and may be lacking in other nutrients. Be sure to check the product label when shopping for infant [formula](#). Do not feed babies younger than age 12 months milks, drinks or "formula" for toddlers. Infant formula includes all the ingredients in the right amount for your baby.

The American Academy of Pediatrics supports breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary foods introduced at about six months, continued as long as mutually desired by mother and child for two years or beyond. If the infant is not breastfed, the AAP and others recommend whole cow milk as suitable for infants beginning at 12 months of age as part of a nutritionally complete, balanced diet.

Although medical or therapeutic formulas are recommended for a variety of conditions, such as chronic gastrointestinal diseases, [metabolic disorders](#), food allergy and others, these prescribed formulas are different from older infant-young child "formulas."

Families and caregivers may be confused by the different names, compositions, and purported benefits of these drinks. Many of the [toddler](#) drinks are high in sugar. And they are more expensive than cow's milk. In addition, and unlike infant formulas, the FDA has no regulatory oversight to ensure that drinks and beverages for this age group adhere to any set of uniform standards.

For toddlers (children 12 months and older), caregivers should provide a

[varied diet](#) with fortified foods to optimize nutritional intake. Older infant-young child "formulas" can safely be used as part of a varied diet for children but do not provide a nutritional advantage and often have undesirable characteristics for most children over a well-balanced diet that includes human milk or cow milk.

The American Academy of Pediatrics also has called for the marketing of these drinks to make a clear and unambiguous distinction from standard infant formula in promotional materials, logos, product names and packaging. They should not be placed alongside [infant formula](#) on store shelves.

There may be reasons why some families avoid cow's milk and [dairy products](#). It's important to ask your pediatrician to evaluate if children are getting all the nutrients they need. Together, you can discuss a plan to address any potential deficiencies.

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