

Soy drinks for babies and toddlers – is it OK?



This fact sheet may help answer questions that families have about soy-based infant formula and soy milk – and whether it is OK to use it with babies and toddlers. The information comes from Accredited Practising Dietitians with the 'Start Right-Eat Right' Child Care Nutrition Award Scheme in South Australia, and is based on current scientific evidence.

Birth – 12 months

Soy-based infant formula

Breast milk or cow's milk-based infant formula should be a baby's major food source and drink for the first 12 months. Soy-based infant formula is not recommended for babies with a cow's milk protein allergy as some babies will also react to soy protein. If a cow's milk protein allergy is diagnosed an extensively hydrolysed infant formula (where the proteins are broken down so they do not cause a reaction) is recommended and available with a prescription.

In a baby with a medical condition such as galactosaemia or lactose intolerance, soy-based infant formula is considered a safe alternative if breast feeding is not possible or cow's milk-based formula is not accepted by the baby. If a baby has lactose intolerance, a cow's milk-based lactose free formula eg: *Karicare De-Lact*, *Nan Sensitive*, *S26 LF* or *Digestelact*, should be used in preference to a soy-based infant formula.

Soy-based infant formula should be discouraged during the first six months of life as there are some concerns about exposure to phytoestrogens while their organ systems are vulnerable. However, it is thought these levels are too low to be a problem. Vegan mothers are encouraged to breastfeed but if breastfeeding is not possible then a soy-based infant formula is appropriate.

Soy, rice and oat milks are inappropriate alternatives to breast milk or cow's milk-based or soy-based infant formulas for the first 12 months of life.

Soy milk

Soy milks are not recommended for children under the age of one, as they have a higher protein and sodium content than breast milk and would put strain on the developing kidneys of babies (cow's milk and soy milk contain similar amounts of protein).

12 months and over

For children over the age of one who are growing normally and eating a varied diet, full fat soy milk, along with cow's milk, can be used as the primary beverage as long as you ensure that the soy milk is calcium fortified eg: *So Good Regular*, *So Good So Nice Regular*, *Vitasoy So Milky Regular*.

Children over 2 years can have calcium fortified 'low fat' or 'light' (1.0-2.5% fat) soy milk eg: *So Natural Extra Milky Soy*, *So Good Essential*, *So Good So Nice Lite*, *Vitasoy So Milky Lite*.

What about the aluminium in soy products?

Aluminium naturally occurs in soil, so is present in most plant foods, including soy beans. In soy drinks, the aluminium present comes from the soy beans, via the soil that they grow in. The estimated aluminium intake in soy milk is well below safe levels as determined by Food Standards Australia New Zealand.

If you are unsure, ask your doctor, your local community dietitian or contact an Accredited Practising Dietitian.