



Organic formula for preterm infants in the NICU and after discharge: Information for parents

Some parents ask whether their baby can be discharged home on organic formula, or breast milk fortified with organic formula. We are happy to help with this request whenever possible. However, before deciding that organic formula is best, it's important to understand how various types of formula are used to help meet the special nutritional needs of premature babies.

The composition of all infant formula sold in the US is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA requires that formula designed for full-term babies (“**term formula**”) contain a minimum amount of key nutrients. Various brands of term formula may contain different amounts, but all must meet the same minimum standards.

Formula for premature babies (“**preterm formula**”) is specifically designed to support the growth and development of premature babies and contains higher amounts of many nutrients than term formula, including minerals, protein, and most vitamins. Calcium and phosphorous content in preterm formula is also very high in order to support bone growth, which usually occurs in the third trimester of pregnancy (from about the 27th to the 40th week of pregnancy). Babies who have missed part or all of this trimester due to early delivery need to “catch up” on bone formation after birth. They need the special nutrients present in preterm formula, or in breast milk fortified with human milk fortifier (HMF).

When babies are getting ready to leave the NICU, many will be ready to switch to term formula, or breast milk supplemented by or fortified with a standard term formula powder. In some cases, however, this may not apply. Babies who are small for gestational age, or those who have had difficulty growing or whose bone growth has been slow, continue to need more than the usual amounts of calcium, phosphorous, and protein. These babies will go home on a special “**post-discharge formula**,” or breast milk fortified with this type of formula. The post-discharge formula has more nutrients than standard formula, but less than preterm formula or HMF-fortified breast milk.

Organic formulas are not available in preterm or post-discharge versions. If your baby is not yet ready for term formula, organic formula may not provide the nutrition your baby needs in the NICU or in the first weeks and months after discharge. It may be possible to switch to an organic preparation 6-9 months after your baby goes home, or soon after. Your pediatrician can give you a better idea of when this might be possible for your baby.

If you would like to find out whether your baby might be ready for organic formula, please discuss it with your nurse. We will evaluate your baby's nutritional needs to see if this is a good choice. You will need to bring in a can of the formula you would like to use so that our dietitians can review it. We do not stock any organic formula, so if it is approved for use, you would need to supply it for your baby.

We hope this information has been helpful. We are happy to answer any further questions you may have about the type of formula your baby receives.