

Drinks for babies and young children



Breast milk is the best drink for your baby

Breast-fed babies do not require any other drinks in their first six months. Breast milk or infant formula should be the main drink during the first year of life.

Continue with breast milk or infant formula as a main drink when you wean your baby. If babies need a drink in addition to milk, they should be given cooled boiled tap water (up to 6 months of age).

Always take extra care when making up infant formula and follow the manufacturer's guidelines. Current advice is to make up one bottle of instant formula at a time. Your health visitor can advise you on this.

You can also use bottled water, but only if it has a sodium content (sometimes listed as Na) of less than 200 mg per litre. Bottled water also needs to be boiled before you prepare the feed.



Soya-based formula contains sugars, which can cause tooth decay. Soya-based formula is only suitable from 6 months and should be given only if advised by your doctor or health visitor. Follow-on formula milk has no advantage over 'first milk' infant formula and is not necessary.

Choosing drinks without sugar for your baby will:

- **set healthy habits for life**
- **help prevent decay in first teeth**
- **improve your baby's overall health and nutrition**
- **keep your baby's smile looking good**



Free-flow cups: a step forward for your baby

- Introduce a free-flow cup at 6 months.
- Free-flow cups allow the water to drip out when the cup is turned upside down. These are given out free of charge by your health visitor as part of the Childsmile programme.
- Non-spill (valve) cups encourage your baby to suck rather than sip and should be avoided. The sucking motion can indirectly lead to speech problems.
- Drinks taken from a bottle are more likely to lead to dental problems because the fluid tends to stay in the mouth longer than when sipping from a cup.
- Aim to have your baby drinking only from a cup (and no longer using bottles) by their first birthday.



- Never give sugary drinks in bottles or valve cups as this can cause very rapid tooth decay.
- Never give your baby sugary drinks last thing at night or during the night if they wake up. Other danger times for sugary drinks are between meals, in the buggy or car seat, or as a comforter.
- Never leave your child alone with a cup or bottle, either during the day or when they are in bed, as they may choke.



**Water is the best drink
between meals for thirsty
babies and toddlers.**



Advice on other drinks

Water

After 6 months of age, water is the best drink to quench thirst between meals. Use tap (rather than bottled) water. Only give cooled boiled tap water to babies under 6 months of age when required. Ask your health visitor for advice.



Cow's milk

From 12 months you can start to give full-fat or semi-skimmed pasteurised cow's, goat's or sheep's milk as a main drink. Milk contains calcium, which is important for strong bones. Pasteurised skimmed and 1% cow's milk should not be given as a main drink until 5 years of age.

Diluted fresh fruit juice

(one part juice to one part water, or more water as necessary)

This can be given from the age of 6 months, at mealtimes only. Diluted fresh fruit juice is a good source of vitamin C and is best given with breakfast or a main meal to help with the absorption of iron. Never give this drink between meals as fresh fruit juices are acidic and can wear away your baby's teeth. Remember – never give juice in a feeding bottle.



Drinks not recommended

✗ **Baby drinks**

Most (even those labelled 'organic' or 'healthy') contain sugar, which can cause tooth decay.

✗ **Flavoured waters**

Most flavoured waters contain artificial sweeteners and therefore should not be given to babies and toddlers. Many of these drinks also contain sugar which can cause tooth decay. These drinks are also acidic and can wear away your baby's teeth.

✗ **Flavoured milk, milkshakes and milk-based smoothies**

These contain sugars and can cause tooth decay. Never give these drinks between meals or last thing at night.

✗ **Diluting squash and fizzy drinks**

These contain sugars and artificial sweeteners. It's not recommended that you give these drinks to babies or toddlers. If diluting squashes are given, remember to serve well diluted and keep to mealtimes only.

✗ **Tea, herbal tea and coffee (even unsweetened)**

These are not suitable drinks for babies or young children. They affect the way your child absorbs iron from their food.

Plain milk and tap water are the safest drinks for teeth.



Key oral health messages

- Brush teeth and gums twice a day, in the morning and last thing at night. Use toothpaste containing at least 1,000 ppm (parts per million) of fluoride.
- Parents and carers should supervise toothbrushing until children are at least 7 years of age. From 7 years of age, many children can brush their own teeth but will still require supervision, motivation and possibly assistance.
- ‘Spit, don’t rinse’ after brushing – this gives the toothpaste time to work to protect teeth.
- Keep food and drinks containing sugar to mealtimes only.
- Plain pasteurised milk and tap water are the safest drinks for teeth.
- Register with a dentist and visit as advised.

For more information, ask your health visitor or visit **www.childsmile.nhs.scot**



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