

PARENT/CARER LEAFLET

MOVING ON FROM MY ALLERGEN FREE INFANT FORMULA – WHAT NEXT?

A guide for parents of children with Cow's Milk Allergy over the age of 2 years

Up to the age of 2 years prescribed specialist formula milk is an important substitute for cow's milk, as it provides a high percentage of your child's nutrients, which are important for good growth and weight gain. However, as your child gets older and eats a greater quantity and variety of solid foods, most nutrition can be provided from foods rather than milk (with the exception of Calcium).

After the age of 2 years your child's specialist formula milk should begin to be switched to an 'alternative milk drink', unless your child's Dietitian has advised otherwise. You may already be using some of these 'milk alternatives' in cooking and they can also be used as a drink instead of formula.

What is an 'alternative milk drink'?

This is the name given to 'ready to drink' cartons of milk substitute found in supermarkets, sold as a cow's milk replacement. They are called 'drinks' rather than 'milk' as they do not contain the same nutrients as milk. They are made from water and usually a plant source such as Soya, Coconut, Almond, Hazelnut, Oats or Rice, so they are suitable for cow's milk allergy (Goats milk and Lactose free milks are unsuitable).

Many are sweetened with sugar/fruit juice so it is important to look after your child's teeth by giving drinks from a beaker, rather than a bottle and ensuring teeth are cleaned by brushing twice daily. It is also recommended to have regular dental check-ups.

Which alternative milk drink should I use?

If your child can tolerate soya, soya milks are the best choice nutritionally, as they contain more calories and protein. If soya is not tolerated your choice will depend on taste and availability. Also consider the following:

- Always choose an alternative milk drink that **contains added calcium**.
- Organic milk substitutes do not contain added calcium.
- Rice milk is unsuitable as a main drink for children under the age of 4½ years due to its natural arsenic content.

Alternative milk drinks are readily available in supermarkets and should be purchased by parents/carers.

I notice that alternative milk drinks do not contain protein, will my child still grow?

Alternative milk drinks (except soya milk) are low in protein and fat which is why they are rarely suitable for children under the age of 2 years or when there is multiple food allergy.

- Offer protein rich foods at two meals a day for example, meat, fish, eggs or pulses (peas and beans), nut spreads
- Use dairy free spreads generously, add regular oil (e.g. frying)
- Give extra snacks if your child seems hungry or not gaining weight.

My child does not like the taste of the new 'milk drink', he prefers formula

Children may need to be offered a new taste many times before deciding if they like it.

It is recommended to transition to an alternative milk drink over a couple of months. Start by trying the new drink on cereals or in cooking and then replace 1 ounce (30ml) of formula with the new drink every few days. If your child continues to dislike the taste, try a different brand or type.

Your GP will continue to prescribe your child's specialist formula for up to 6 months after the age of 2 years, whilst you transition to an alternative milk drink. After 6 months (or sooner if the transition is achieved sooner) your GP will **not** be able to prescribe the specialist formula. The only exception is if there is a valid medical reason or on the advice from a dietitian.

Taste preference is not considered a valid reason to continue prescribing after 6 months.

Can my child be allergic to the new 'milk drink'?

Some children with milk allergy can get similar symptoms with soya (usually those with tummy problems), but this is usually at a younger age. If your child continues to get symptoms with alternative milk drinks try another substitute (or discuss with your dietitian). Alternative milk drinks based on nuts e.g. Almond, Hazelnut (Coconut is not a nut) should be avoided in children with a proven nut allergy (this should be diagnosed at the hospital allergy clinic).

Does my child need any Vitamin or Mineral supplements?

Children taking 'alternative milk drinks' instead of infant formula should routinely take a multivitamin containing Vitamins D, A and riboflavin to ensure adequate intake.

For young children multivitamin drops and syrups are readily available to purchase in supermarkets and Chemists (*ask a Pharmacist if advice is needed*). Healthy start vitamins are also available as part of the healthy start programme.

If less than 300ml of alternative milk drink is taken (or you are using a drink that is NOT calcium fortified) it may be recommended your child also takes a calcium supplement. Discuss this with your Doctor, Dietitian or refer to leaflet '**is my child getting enough calcium**' (available from September 2017).

My child has multiple food allergies and has limited food choices, should I continue with my allergy infant formula?

Your Dietitian will advise your GP to continue prescribing your infant formula if there is a medical need. This includes having multiple food allergies, feeding problems or difficulties in achieving nutritional adequacy from solid foods, especially if protein sources are limited.

Can't I just put my child back on ordinary cow's milk rather than using an 'alternative milk drink'?

The majority of children outgrow their milk allergy by the age of 3 years. If you have not had an appointment with a Dietitian in the last 6 months (or would like to retry cow's milk) ask your GP to be referred to the Dietitian who will discuss a safe way to try milk back into your child's diet, using a milk re-introduction ladder (this starts with giving traces of a biscuit containing milk as an ingredient). Do not try milk re-introduction without professional advice if your child has had a reaction to cow's milk in the past that caused rash, cough, wheeze, severe vomiting/diarrhoea. However, if your child is already tolerating a full portion of yoghurt or cheese then small amounts of fresh milk can be tried.

Does my child HAVE to take a milk alternative, he prefers cereals dry?

If your child eats good quantities of a variety of foods from different food groups (meat/fish/pulses, cereals/bread, fruits/vegetables) and is growing and gaining weight well, an alternative to milk is not essential, BUT YOUR CHILD WILL NEED A CALCIUM SUPPLEMENT and should take multivitamins. Discuss this with your Doctor or Dietitian, or refer to leaflet '**is my child getting enough calcium**' (available from September 2017).

He/she may also need extra snacks.

Author: Heidi Ball Paediatric Dietitian UHL/Emma Jordan, Paediatric Dietitian LPT