



How to safely reintroduce dairy products



Moving on from low allergy formula

Most children will be able to stop drinking infant formula or baby milk after their 1st birthday. After 12 months of age, children get most of their nutrients from solid foods, and drinking a lot of formula can fill them up, so they eat less solid food and miss out on important vitamins, minerals and fibre. This increases their risk of having low iron levels and constipation. Many children outgrow milk allergies as their systems mature, and they can begin to enjoy dairy as part of a balanced diet.

Why is dairy important in the diet?

Milk and dairy foods provide essential nutrients such as calcium, protein, vitamin D, and other nutrients important for growth, bone development, teeth, and overall health. Despite there being many alternatives (non-dairy products) available, they often do not provide the same nutrition as dairy.

How to safely reintroduce dairy foods

Your child's dietitian or health visitor can support you through this process. It should be done slowly to allow you to judge the amount and type of dairy your child can cope with. This is done using the 'iMap Milk Ladder'. This provides a safe, structured approach to reintroducing dairy products into a child's diet. It allows for monitoring of any reactions while progressing gradually with amounts of milk being given. This usually takes place between 9-12 months old. You will find some helpful resources including the Milk Ladder information, at this link <https://niformulary.hscni.net/patient-area/infant-feeding>



Benefits of working through the Milk Ladder

This will help confirm if your child has outgrown the milk allergy. Avoiding dairy for long periods of time may delay a return to your child being able to tolerate dairy products and may increase the risk of severe reactions in the future. This controlled method helps determine which level of the Milk Ladder your child can safely tolerate foods from. If reintroduction confirms your child has outgrown the milk allergy it can make their diet less restrictive, more fun and enjoyable as a wider variety of foods will be available. This can help reduce worries around foods and social situations involving foods as your child gets older.



My baby is still reacting to cow's milk, what can I use instead?

When your baby reaches 12 months old, they can be given fortified plant-based milk alternatives as a main drink. Soya, oat, almond or coconut milks are some examples. These can be bought in lots of supermarkets and even smaller stores.

You should choose one that has calcium, vitamin D and iodine added to it, and choose the unsweetened versions, so your baby gets the nutrition they need without the added sugar. Check which vitamins and minerals they contain by looking at the back of the carton.

Don't forget, after 12 months old a baby's growth slows down, so they don't need as much calcium as they use to. Children between 1 to 3 years old need 350mg of calcium daily.



Scan the QR code below for more information on good sources of calcium.

It's easier than you might think to get enough calcium. Alternative milks can be used as a drink from a cup, in cereals or puddings, there is also dairy free yogurts and cheeses. Bread often has added calcium and some fruit and vegetables are good sources too. This is also a good time to start weaning your baby from their bottle feeds and encourage them to use a cup for all their drinks.



It is recommended that babies who are not on formula milk, start a suitable vitamin and mineral supplement for their age, containing vitamins A, C and D. These are widely available in local pharmacies and supermarkets. Aim to continue with this until your child is around school age.

Check for eligibility for 'Healthy Start' vitamins, which are available free of charge at the link below.

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/healthy-start-help-buy-healthy-food-and-milk>

Although it's recommended to try and bring dairy into the diet it's not always possible for every child. Some groups of children may need to keep low allergy formula in their diet for a little longer.

If this applies to your child you should consult your paediatrician or dietitian before making any changes to their diet.

Why has my child's formula not been prescribed?

Most children will be able to stop drinking infant formula or baby milk after their 1st birthday.

This supports a Department of Health initiative to ensure medicines are used safely, effectively and only when they provide a clear health benefit. View details about this initiative at this link: **<https://niformulary.hscni.net/deprescribing/position-statements/>**.

Healthcare professionals only prescribe infant formula to children over 12 months when they have:

- Multiple food allergies;
- Elemental dietary requirement;
- Gastro-intestinal disorders;
- Short bowel syndrome.



Any review of your child's formula prescription ensures that their treatment continues safely if it is still needed.

Children with confirmed IgE allergy should not have changes to their diet made without consulting with their paediatrician or dietitian first.



For more information go to:
www.nidirect.gov.uk/cows-milk-allergy

Date of issue: August 2026

Review date: August 2029

