Information for Clinical Choice

Infant Formula

Introduction

Information for Clinical Choice (ICC) supports clinicians in selecting suitable products by providing clear, comparable descriptions of items available through NHS Supply Chain.

The ICC aligns with the UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative, which emphasises positive early parent–infant contact and recognises breastfeeding as the optimal start for infants. UNICEF also acknowledges that not all parents can breastfeed and that formula milk is therefore required in some cases. To avoid implying endorsement of specific brands, UNICEF recommends offering a variety of options.

With 99% of maternity services and 77% of neonatal services working towards accreditation, the ICC helps healthcare providers meet these standards by offering guidance on framework products and their comparable alternatives.

Stage 1 infant formula is the only suitable alternative to human milk and meets all nutritional requirements for infants from birth to 12 months, FSNT (March 2025), WHO (2023) alongside the introduction of solid foods from six months. Although Stage 2 and Stage 3 formulas exist for older infants, clinical guidance indicates that Stage 1 remains sufficient up to 12 months and follow-on milks provide no additional nutritional benefit. Cow's milk is recommended from one year of age.

Specialist milks, breast milk supplements, and fortifiers are available by prescription for premature or low-birth-weight infants or those with specific feeding or digestive needs.

The ICC includes powdered and ready-to-feed formulas and supplements across the following categories:

- Infant Formula Powdered Stage 1 (from birth)
- Ready to Feed Infant Formula Stage 1 (from birth)
- Powdered Infant Formula Stage 2 and 3 (from 6 months)
- Powdered formula for medical purposes, including Early Low Birth Weight Stage 1 and 2 and products for malabsorption
- Ready to Feed medical-purpose formulas, including Early Low Birth Weight Stage 1 and 2, hydrolysed, and high-energy formulas
- Powdered Early Low Birth Weight human milk fortifier and protein supplement sachets.

The criteria provided, in the form of a Product Matrix and Support Document, is the result of a product review, conducted by Sandra Evans Clinical Lead for the Infant Feeding and Accessories framework.

The Product Matrix is available to view in the Downloads section of the Contract Information page for Infant Feeding and Accessories – https://www.supplychain.nhs.uk/baby-food

If you have any questions, would like further information, or have feedback to share, please contact:

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References

FSNT March (2025) First steps nutrition trust (March 2025) Infant formula: An overview Infant-formula_overview_March-2025final.pdf Accessed March 2026.

WHO (2023) World Health Organisation (2023) WHO Guideline for complementary feeding of infants and young children 6-23 months of age: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240081864 Accessed March 2026.