

15 Risks of Formula Feeding



When having a newborn, there are a lot of decisions to make. Infant feeding is an important aspect of newborn care that will impact lifelong health. The World Health Organization recommends that parents be given information from medical research about the health risks associated with using formula. This information is important to know in order to make an informed decision regarding infant feeding.

Higher risk of lung infections.

Children who are formula fed are 16.7 times more likely to have pneumonia than children who are given only breastmilk as infants.

Higher risk of ear infections.

Studies show that infants who are formula fed are 50 percent more likely to have ear infections than babies who receive only breastmilk.

Higher risk of infection from contaminated formula.

Powdered infant formula is not sterilized and, in rare cases, can contain *cronobacter*, a germ that can cause life-threatening infections in very young infants.

Higher risk of bowel diseases.

Formula feeding is linked to a higher risk of bowel diseases, such as celiac disease and inflammatory bowel disease. Also, premature babies who are formula fed have a higher rate of a gut disease called necrotizing enterocolitis.

Risk of lower intelligence.

Studies show that children who are breastfed perform better on intelligence tests and tests for brain development than children who were formula fed.

Higher risk of effects of environmental poisons.

Breastfeeding lowers the harmful effects on a child's health from poisons in the environment like PCBs and dioxins. PCBs and dioxins can lead to reproductive and developmental problems and cancers.

Higher risk of allergy.

Formula feeding is linked to a higher incidence of eczema, allergies to food, inherited allergies and allergies which affect breathing, such as hay fever.

Higher risk of asthma.

Medical studies show that babies who are fed formula are 40-50 percent more likely to have asthma or wheezing.

Higher risk of heart disease.

A study shows that breastfeeding may help to reduce the risk of heart disease by keeping cholesterol levels low later in life. It also showed that 13- to 16-year-olds who were fed formula have higher blood pressures than children who had received breastmilk.

Higher risk of death from diseases.

Babies who are formula fed have a higher risk of death due to illnesses, such as diarrhea and lung infections.

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Higher risk of obesity.

Research shows that children who are formula fed are nearly 40 percent more likely to be obese than children who are breastfed — even after accounting for other factors that may explain why a person may be overweight.

Higher risk of childhood cancers.

Research shows that children who have not been breastfed are more likely to have leukemia and other cancers than children who were fed only breastmilk.

Higher risk of diarrhea.

Studies show that babies who are formula fed are twice as likely to have diarrhea as breastfed babies.

Higher risk of diabetes

Formula feeding is associated with increased risk of both Type 1 (juvenile onset, insulin dependent) and Type 2 (adult onset) diabetes.

Higher risk of SIDS.

Formula fed babies have a fourfold increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.



The World Health Organization recommends:

- **Exclusively breastfeeding for the first six months.**
- **Gradually introducing other nutritious foods at six months, along with continued breastfeeding for two years and beyond.**

Source: Adapted from INFACT Canada's *Fourteen Risks of Formula Feeding: A Brief Annotated Bibliography* by the Breastfeeding Action Group in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. Used with permission.