

## **Should Infant Formula be More Regulated?**

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## Should Infant Formula be More Regulated?

I work at Target, so I know that baby formulas are consistently being recalled; it's not just one brand or type, it's variable across all baby formulas. Infant formula needs to be more regulated; for many parents, it's the only option. Many "formula skeptics" believe that breast feeding is the only option, and that Biden is the reason for the infant formula shortage, which brought many parents to the conclusion that homemade baby formula was a reliable alternative during the formula shortage. In addition, formula companies project that formula is completely healthy and has no potential side effects. Infant formula should have more regulations in place because it's often one of the only alternatives for parents who can't breastfeed. The main ideas that would bring you to this conclusion are: *Cronobacter sakazakii* bacteria was the reason for the past shortage, homemade formula can be dangerous for the infant, it contains toxic ingredients, and has side effects.

A popular misconception that many people can make is that parents can only rely on breastfeeding or that formula is an unhealthy alternative. Doctor Rebekah Diamond, an assistant professor of pediatrics states (2022), "Many, if not most, infants will need at least some amount of formula supplementation to reach their optimal health." Formula is needed for many infants to achieve proper health even for the ones who are breastfed. The majority of formulas on the market contain omega 3-fatty acids and carbohydrates, which are important for healthy brain development. The products also contain vitamins to help with overall growth and to support bone growth. Prebiotics are also needed to achieve a healthy immune system (2022, Enfamil). Baby formula contains all the necessary ingredients for parents who are unable to breastfeed. It is important that infants get needed nutrients while growing and maturing. A well-made formula

with ingredients needed to keep an infant growing and maturing is a good alternative when there aren't enough regulations in place.

Misleading partisan claims were surfacing around the baby formula shortage. The claims that surfaced suggested that Joe Biden was responsible for the “bare shelves” (Hale, 2022). The shortage was due to a bacterium that contaminated many types of formulas. Carrie Arnold from *New Scientist* (2022) writes, “Inspectors discovered that *Cronobacter sakazakii* bacteria were present in the formula and on multiple surfaces in the facility. In mid-February, while the investigation was ongoing, Abbott Nutrition announced a voluntary recall of formulas produced at the plant and halted production. The FDA also warned consumers not to use powdered infant formula produced at the facility.” This bacterium can be serious on individuals with weakened immune systems (infant’s immune systems are not as developed); infants who contract *Cronobacter* infections are at risk for developing meningitis and experience seizures, brain abscesses, or other complications that can cause long term problems (CDC, 2022). *Cronobacter sakazakii* can cause severe problems for infants, President Biden and the FDA needed to remove the contaminated products from the shelves to protect infants and to not allow the products to cause any more damage. Steve Nelson with the New York Post states, “The White House on Thursday said the Food and Drug Administration will finally start clearing the way for imports of baby formula from overseas to address nationwide shortages.” During the shortage, baby formulas made in the European Union were thought to be an alternative since they meet nutritional requirements and are not contaminated, but many of the ingredients in the formulas did not meet the standards set by the FDA (Brown, 2022). The FDA has begun to ease restrictions in their regulations due to the shortage; President Biden was unable to import formula over due to the FDA’s tight restrictions.

In addition, due to the widespread infant formula shortage, many parents had to look for alternatives since infant formula was not available: homemade formulas became that alternative. Due to misinformation spreading, many people thought that homemade formula recipes that were surfacing were safe alternatives. Homemade formulas should, in reality, never be used as alternatives. The FDA (2022) states, “The FDA advises parents and caregivers to not make or feed homemade infant formula to infants. Homemade infant formula recipes have not been evaluated by the FDA and may lack nutrients vital to an infant’s growth.” Homemade baby formulas are made at home and not synthesized in a factory where proper guidelines need to be met, since they were not professionally made there is a possibility that nutrition and safety standards are not met; commercially made formulas have been reviewed by the FDA and must follow specific guidelines (homemade formula has had no evaluations or tests run on them to make sure that they are safe). Homemade formula can be contaminated or have infections, have nutrient deficiencies/excesses, or lead to poor growth (Johns Hopkins, 2019). Even though some formulas pose potential risks, they are made in a factory under controlled environments unlike homemade baby formulas. Commercially made formulas are made to follow exact ingredient sizes unlike homemade formulas where there is a large margin of error. Homemade baby formulas should never be an alternative.

In addition, formula supply chains are advertising that infant formula has safe ingredients and a healthy alternative for infants. Formulas can actually contain many harmful and toxic ingredients; in order for a baby formula to be a good alternative, it needs to be made correctly, with safe ingredients. Nation (2019) writes, “In 2017, the Clean Label Project tested baby formulas for toxins — and the results were shocking. More than 70 percent of infant formulas tested positive for arsenic, and 60 percent of baby products advertised as ‘BPA free’ tested

positive for BPA.” Arsenic can cause many problems: it can cause cancer and it can be harmful to the kidneys, lungs, and lymphatic system (CDC, 2019). BPA is bisphenol A, which is found in plastic and epoxy resins; it can cause health effects in the brain and prostate gland of children and infants (Bauer, 2022). Although infant formula is regulated by the Food and Drug Association, there are not enough in place if toxins are being found in a supposedly safe food source for infants. Metals and plastics being found should prove that baby formula needs more regulations. A parent should not have to worry about metals and toxins being in their children’s food.

In addition, infant formula companies claim that their products have no side effects, that they won’t cause future problems. Formulas have the potential to have side effects on the infant’s health that could cause future problems. Michelle Llamas (2022), a Board-Certified Patient Advocate states, “Premature babies may also develop a serious condition called necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) when drinking cow’s milk baby formulas such as Enfamil or Similac.” Necrotizing enterocolitis is an intestinal disease most common in premature infants; it can lead to bacterial infections and intestinal tissue damage. It happens within the first two weeks of life in infants who are fed formula (Llamas, 2022). Infants who had Necrotizing enterocolitis could have future blockage due to scarred bowel and may not be able to absorb nutrients (WebMD, 2020). The National Institutes of Health (2018) writes “Some studies suggested that, in infants who are genetically susceptible, early exposure to complex foreign proteins, like those in cow’s milk, may increase the risk for an immune system reaction to beta cells and development of type 1 diabetes.” Diabetes is a life-long disorder characterized by the body’s inability to use glucose. There is no way to prevent diabetes from occurring, but formula and diabetes have a higher correlation compared to breastfeeding. The FDA should evaluate the future side effects of baby

formula before allowing the products out into the world. Even if the side effects are slight, infants don't have as many food options as adults.

Ultimately, formulas need to have more regulations in place: Infant formula is frequently one of the sole options for parents who are unable to breastfeed; the *Cronobacter sakazakii* bacteria caused the shortage; it contains toxic ingredients and has side effects; Homemade formula can be dangerous for the infant. Infant formula is a necessity for many infants, not all parents can breastfeed. There either needs to be safer alternatives or cleaner products need to be used. When formula is recalled, many parents will have to switch to a different type of formula that could potentially cause more harm to their infant just from switching to a new product. I want to be a labor and delivery nurse in the future, so it is important to me that the infants that I help deliver are consuming safe products so they can be healthy in the future. Baby formula needs to have more regulations in place, we should not be putting the next generations in harm's way, especially when it's often the only option.

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