Background information about infant milks

Infant feeding patterns in the UK

The most recently available national Infant Feeding Survey of parents across the UK (McAndrew et al, 2012) showed that, in 2010:

- About a fifth of mothers (19%) did not initiate breastfeeding at birth.
- 31% of parents introduced infant formula on the first day of life.
- 43% of mothers who used both breast and formula feeding used formula at all or almost all feeds from birth.
- By 1 week of age more than half of infants (52%) had had some infant formula, and by 6 weeks of age 73% of infants had been given infant formula.
- By 4-10 weeks, 33% of infants were entirely fed on infant formula and 26% were given formula and breastmilk.
- By 4-6 months of age, 60% of infants were entirely fed on infant formula.
- By 9 months, 95% of infants had had some infant milk.

More recent data on initiation and breastfeeding at 6-8 weeks is available regionally each quarter but this varies in quality. The latest quarterly data for England shows little difference in the use of infant formula since the 2010 survey but some areas are seeing higher exclusive and any breastfeeding rates at 6-8 weeks.

The majority of infants in the UK are given infant formula during the first six months of life, despite Department of Health recommendations that breastfeeding should be the source of nutrition during this period. The Infant Feeding Survey does not ask parents what type of milk they offer their infant during the first few weeks of life (stage 1 of the survey covers the period 4-10 weeks, but the majority of infants in the survey are 4-6 weeks of age) as there is an assumption that this will be an appropriate first milk. When mothers were asked when they first used follow-on formula, 16% of parents reported that they did so before 6 months of age. This is despite recommendations on follow-on formula packaging that follow-on formula is not appropriate for infants under 6 months of age, and advice from the majority of health professionals that a change to follow-on formula is not necessary at any stage. Only 68% of mothers said they knew the difference between follow-on formula and formula. Non-working women were more likely to use follow-on formula before 6 months of age.

Mothers who did use follow-on formula by 4-6 months said they did so on the advice of a health professional (17%) or because they thought it was better for the baby (18%) and 8% because they had seen information advertised. By the time their babies were 8-10 months of age, the majority of mothers were using follow-on formula.

Data from the Diet and nutrition survey of infants and young children (Department of Health and Food Standards Agency, 2013) suggests that 38% of children aged 12-18 months drank some kind of formula and 62% drank none. Eight per cent of those who gave formula only used ready-to-feed formula for children of this age. This survey reported that 18% of children aged 12-18 months were given growing-up milks, and the mean intake was 342ml/day. These milks were also used by 3% of families with children aged 10-11 months with a mean intake 397ml/day in this survey. Amongst 12-18 month olds, 8% were still receiving
breastmilk with an estimated volume of 290ml/day, 1% were still given first infant formula, 1% hungry baby formula, 16% follow-on formula and 3% other milk products.