

Frequently Asked Questions: Breastfeeding and the New Food Packages

Q: Why is there no Partially Breastfeeding food package in the first month postpartum?

A: Exclusive breastfeeding during the first month after birth is important to fully establish a mother's milk supply. To help moms establish milk supply, WIC will not routinely provide formula to breastfed babies. If a baby does not receive formula from WIC, mom receives the exclusively breastfeeding food package. However, *for medical reasons or if a mom does not intend to breastfeed much longer*, she may receive formula for the baby and the novel breastfeeding package for herself. This mom should still be encouraged to exclusively breastfeed, and only given the minimum amount of formula needed.

Q: It seems like infants on WIC still receive a lot of formula, and that some women may report less breastfeeding in order to get more formula. What guidance do you suggest we give participants?

A: The current regulations allow breastfeeding mom/baby pairs to receive up to the full amount of formula, although only offering the amount needed helps protect breastfeeding. The new food rules indicate that the maximum amount of formula that a breastfeeding mom/baby pair may receive after the first month postpartum is *half of the full formula amount*. With that in mind, it seems more likely that a mom would understate her breastfeeding to get more formula with the current rules rather than the new rules. In any situation, staff should evaluate mom's breastfeeding plan, challenges, and provide only the amount of formula that is needed.

We need to help everyone think differently about breastfeeding! The majority of WIC mothers start breastfeeding (75%!), but about half of them quit by one month postpartum. If WIC mothers understand that breastfeeding really is the normal, expected, and healthiest way to feed their babies, why would they choose a less optimal food source unless we don't believe it ourselves? We must help moms by encouraging and educating prenatally, and supporting, educating, and encouraging postpartum. We need everyone to understand that WIC is about maternal and infant health and development, and not just about free formula.

A good place to start is by asking, "What have you heard about breastfeeding?" rather than asking a noncommittal question like, "Are you planning to breastfeed or formula-feed your baby?" It will take time to shift the current perspective that formula is just as good as breastfeeding. We need to focus on how to promote and support breastfeeding. Some women may misrepresent breastfeeding to receive more formula, but in time the number in that group will decrease.

Q: WIC is trying to be the breastfeeding program, but still provides formula. Isn't this contradictory?

A: It is true that WIC supports exclusive breastfeeding as the optimal nutrition source for infants. However, some women cannot breastfeed, some choose not to breastfeed, and some infants need supplemental formula for various reasons. WIC's primary goal in infant nutrition is to ensure that all Colorado WIC babies receive proper nutrition. For this reason, formula is available to WIC participants despite the knowledge that breastfeeding is the gold standard for infant feeding.

Q: Is novel breastfeeding considered breastfeeding one time per day? Is partial breastfeeding any other amount of combination feeding (for example, 2 – 4 times per day)?

A: WIC is moving away from categorizing women based on how much they breastfeed, to providing support and recognizing them as breastfeeding women even if they breastfeed very little.

In light of this shift in thinking, the new women's Breastfeeding Food Packages are inherently linked to the baby's food packages; mom's food package is based on how much formula the baby receives, not on how much she breastfeeds. Likewise, staff is encouraged to further protect breastfeeding by only providing the minimum amount of formula required.

Q: What are the categories for women? What benefits does a novel breastfeeding woman receive after 6 months?

A: Any woman who breastfeeds will be a category B, and will be counted as a participant and receive support for 12 months after delivery. However, novel breastfeeding women receive food for only 6 months. They will remain participants and receive support for 12 months postpartum in the form of: nutrition and breastfeeding education and information, referrals, guidance when she faces challenges such as weaning or returning to work or school, continued participation in WIC support groups, and a pump if she needs one.

Pregnant women are still Category P, and Category N refers to Postpartum, Non-Breastfeeding women.

Q: For moms who are novel breastfeeding and no longer receiving food, will they receive a "Thank you for Breastfeeding" check at 6 months to count towards caseload?

A: Yes, any woman who is novel breastfeeding a 6 – 12 month old will receive a "Thank you for Breastfeeding" voucher.

Q: Why are baby meats offered at 6 months of age, and only to exclusively breastfed infants?

A: All infants need a source of iron and zinc around 6 months of age; baby food meats are an excellent source of these nutrients. These foods are provided to exclusively breastfed infants as an incentive to encourage moms to continue exclusively breastfeeding. However, meat provides a variety of nutrients beneficial to all infants; moms who are not exclusively breastfeeding should be encouraged to make their own baby food meats.

Q: If a mother needs the maximum amount of formula for her infant, which food package will she receive – the Novel Breastfeeding food package or Postpartum, Non-Breastfeeding food package?

A: If the mother is breastfeeding, she will receive the Novel Breastfeeding food package. If she is not breastfeeding, she will receive the Postpartum food package. These packages contain the same *food* benefits, but the breastfeeding mother will receive breastfeeding support for 12 months after birth.

Q: Is the 2007 Breastfeeding Education Guide the most updated version? Will there be changes to any of the materials in this book with the implementation of the new food packages? If so, will the state office send the individual replacement pages?

A: The blue 2007 Breastfeeding Education Guide is the most updated version, except that the white pages were further updated for the food package mailing. The State Office plans to update the white pages in the future.

- Q:** What food package does WIC issue to a mom who is exclusively breastfeeding multiple infants?
- A:** Moms exclusively breastfeeding multiples will receive approximately 1.5 times the amount of food in the exclusively breastfeeding food package. The food package will begin with the letters BM____ (Breastfeeding Multiples).
- Q:** Previous information stated that babies may receive the following formula amounts:
Birth – 1 month: 1 to 9 cans of formula
1 – 3 months: 1 to 9 cans
4 – 5 months: 1 to 10 cans
6 – 12 months: 1 to 7 cans
Why is there an increase at 4 – 5 months?
- A:** Consistent with current infant feeding recommendations, WIC will no longer issue infant cereal to 4 – 5 month old infants. Instead, cereal and baby food will be issued around 6 months of age. The reason for the formula increase at 4 – 5 months is to meet the higher calorie needs of formula-fed infants at this time. When solid foods are added at 6 months, infants won't need as much formula since these additional foods will help meet their nutritional needs.
- Q:** For the infant checks, will the first baby food checks be vegetables only or will parents have the choice to offer fruits, vegetables, or meats (for breastfed infants) first?
- A:** At six months, an infant's checks will list a specific number of jars of baby food fruits or vegetables; breastfed infants' checks will also list baby food meats. Participants will have the choice of which products they want to purchase.