What you really need to know about bottle feeding.

Helpful hints from SMA Nutrition
Help from people with experience.

As a new mum, you decide how best to feed your baby. Whilst everybody agrees that breast feeding is the ideal, for a variety of good reasons, many mums decide to bottle feed instead.

This booklet sets out to provide you with information about bottle feeding, and, because it's been prepared by people with experience of pregnancy and motherhood, it's full of realistic and practical advice.

In an effort to constantly improve the quality of the booklets and information we offer to mums, your feedback is greatly appreciated. If you have any tips you think other mums would find useful, or comments on how we could improve this booklet, you can write to us or ring the SMA Careline. See the back of this booklet for more information.

Note: The term “baby milk” has been used throughout this text to mean an infant formula, suitable for use for infants from birth onwards.
Q: If I choose to bottle feed, what type of milk can I give to my baby?

A: If you decide to bottle feed your baby, it is important that you choose the correct type of milk for your baby's age. Up until six months of age, the only milks which are suitable for babies are breast milk and baby milk. From six months, you could choose a follow-on milk. Follow-on milks are explained on page 5.

There is a large choice of baby milks available. The information in this booklet is intended to help you make the right choice for you and your baby.

Q: Which type of baby milk should I choose if my baby is 0-6 months old?

A: Baby milks for this age can be divided into two groups - first milks and hungry milks.

As their name suggests, first milks are the most suitable for young babies as they are made to closely resemble breast milk. You may see them in the shops with the number 1 on the can or they could have words like “Infant milk from birth onwards” on them. You can give your baby a first milk at any stage from birth onwards. If he is happy on this type of milk, there is no need to switch to a hungrier milk. Hungrier milks are intended to satisfy babies who have bigger appetites. They still resemble breast milk very closely, but contain a protein which seems to take longer to digest. They can be useful for older babies who may not be totally satisfied on their first milk.

You may see them in the shops with the number 2 on the can, or they could have words like “Infant milk for hungrier bottle fed babies” on them. Although they are intended for slightly older, hungrier babies, you can give your baby this type of milk at any stage from birth onwards.

All brands of first and hungrier milks are made from highly modified cow's milk and provide complete nutrition for babies from 0-6 months.

Q: Should I use powder or liquid?

A: If you decide to bottle feed your baby in hospital, you will be offered baby milk in little 100 ml bottles which are ready to use. These little bottles are only available in hospital and should not be taken home. They are designed to be disposable and may crack or break if used more than once.

If you decide to use a baby milk after you have left hospital, you can buy SMA baby milks in liquid form from your local supermarket or pharmacy. These ready-to-use milks come in two sizes: a 250 ml carton which can be used for individual feeds, or a 1 litre carton which provides a whole day’s feeds for most babies. The little cartons can be ideal as “stand bys” for breast feeding mums, for babysitters, for emergencies, if you are concerned about water purity or if you are travelling.

Powder is the most common sort of baby milk used and you can estimate that one 900g can will last your baby about 1 week.
Q: Can I give my baby cow's milk, and if so, when?

A: Until your baby is 6 months old, the only milks you should give him are breast milk or a baby milk. Other types of milk are not suitable as they will not meet your baby's nutritional needs and they could make him ill.

When your baby gets to 6 months old, you can continue to use breast milk or baby milk, or you could introduce a follow-on milk, which is specially designed to meet your baby's changing nutritional needs and has extra iron, calcium, and vitamins.

Cow's milk (or doorstep milk) should not be used as a milk drink until your baby is at least 1 year old, as it is very low in some essential vitamins and minerals. For example, at 6 months you would need to give your baby 22 pints of cow's milk per day to provide the iron he needs. Iron is needed for blood production and for the development of the mind and the body. Your baby's iron needs are particularly high between 6 months and 2 years of age.

After 1 year, you can continue to use breast milk, baby milk or follow-on milk. You can also use whole cow's milk, but if you do so, additional supplements of Vitamin A and D are recommended. You can buy these as drops from any chemist.

A pint of milk a day is necessary until your child is 5 years old to provide the calcium he needs for healthy bones and teeth.

Semi-skimmed milk should not be used until your baby is 2, and skimmed milk should not be used until he is 5. Again, they are low in some essential vitamins and minerals, and because they have had fat removed, they will not provide your child with enough energy.

Q: What should I use if I think my baby is allergic to milk?

A: Many people believe that goat's and sheep's milk can be used for babies who are allergic to cow's milk-based products like normal baby milk. However, this is not the case, and babies who are allergic to cow's milk are likely to be allergic to these types of milk too. Goat's and sheep's milk are both low in some essential vitamins and minerals and, unless pasteurised, they can also carry germs. It is not advisable to use either type of milk for babies until they are at least 1 year old. After this age, you can use these milks, but you will need to supplement them with vitamins and minerals, and the milk should be pasteurised to kill any germs.

Soya milks available in health food shops are also unsuitable for babies and should not be used.

If you think your baby may be allergic to milk, you must consult your doctor or healthcare professional BEORE you change your baby's feed. They may recommend that you use a special baby milk (such as a soya-based milk) which you can obtain on prescription, but this must be used under medical supervision as a true allergy to milk can be serious if not treated properly.
Q: How do I prepare the powdered feed for my baby?

A: Making up a feed is easy once you’ve got the knack, but it takes a few feeds before you are confident that you’re doing it correctly! Full instructions are always given on the container of milk powder and it is essential that you follow them exactly because preparing the feed properly is important to your baby’s health. Cleaning and sterilising all your equipment is equally important to protect your baby from harmful germs. You must also ensure that your work surfaces and hands are clean.

A couple of useful tips when preparing powder are to plan ahead and to choose bottles with wide necks. This can help reduce the mess caused by powder spillage.