



Toddler Milk: Take it or Leave it?

Have you seen or heard about “toddler milks”? They are popping up on store shelves. The labels look like infant formula or protein drinks for kids. Makers promote the drinks and powdered mixes as nutritious drinks to help infants and toddlers transition to balanced eating. They also claim to support brain development and immune health. It all sounds great. But do young children really need these drinks?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends infants drink breastmilk or fortified infant formula for the first year of life. When a child turns 1, you can add whole cow’s milk or soy milk to the growing variety of solid foods children eat. Cow’s milk and soy milk help support a balanced diet of fats, protein, vitamin D, and calcium.

Toddler milks are not necessary for the growth and development of your toddler. There are three reasons to leave the toddler milks on the shelf.

1. These drinks are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA monitors infant formulas specific for children 12 months and younger to meet safety and nutrient needs for growing infants. However, there is no criteria for formulas for older children. The toddler milks may contain nutrients in excessive amounts. The labels often have unregulated health claims that can be misleading.
2. Toddler milk contains added sugar for a sweeter taste. Unflavored cow’s milk contains beneficial vitamins and minerals without the added sugar.
3. These formulas are often more expensive than cow’s milk. These “formulas” should not serve as food or meal supplements for toddlers.

Overall, the AAP concludes that these toddler milks provide no advantage to children who consume an adequate diet of solid foods. With a higher price point than cow’s milk or soy milk, there is no need to add them to your grocery cart.

Reference

Fuchs G. J., Abrams S. A., Amezor A. A., et al.; American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Nutrition. Older Infant Young Child “Formulas.” *Pediatrics*. 2023;152(5): e2023064050

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