The AAP and ACOG (2002) have recommended that infants be given breast milk or iron-fortified formula rather than whole milk until 1 year of age. Neither whole milk nor skim milk is an acceptable alternative for infant feeding. The levels of protein in cow's milk are much higher (50% to 75% greater) than in human milk. It is poorly digested and may cause bleeding of the gastrointestinal tract. Cow's milk also has higher levels of calcium, phosphorus, sodium, and potassium, which increase the renal solute load and result in greater obligatory water loss. Skim milk lacks adequate calories, fat content, and essential fatty acids necessary for proper development of the newborn's neurologic system. Nutritionists also advise against giving low-fat milk (2% or 1% milk) or skim milk to children under 2 years of age.

Table 31–1 compares several factors for parents to consider when choosing between breastfeeding and formula-feeding.