

Elimination Diet for the Breastfeeding Parent

Q&A with a Dietitian

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Q: My baby is suspected / has been diagnosed with cow's milk protein allergy, should I stop breastfeeding?

A: No, breastfeeding is the best source of nutrition for all infants and should be supported.⁷ Mothers should be encouraged to continue breastfeeding even when a cow's milk protein allergy is suspected. You may be advised to follow a cow's milk protein free diet to confirm or exclude a suspected diagnosis of cow's milk protein allergy however it is important you do so with the support of a dietitian to ensure you are reaching your individual nutritional needs.²

Q: I suspect my exclusively breastfed baby has CMPA should I eliminate all sources of cow's milk from my diet immediately?

A: No. Cow's milk can provide essential nutrients in the diet, especially when breastfeeding. It is best to consult your healthcare professional, prior to eliminating anything from your diet.

Q: I have been instructed to start a cow's milk free diet. How long should I eliminate milk from my diet?

A: Cow's milk and all ingredients derived from cow's milk should be excluded for 2 to 4 weeks. It is useful to keep a symptom diary for your child over this period so you can see if there has been symptom improvement at the end of this trial. In order to confirm a diagnosis of milk allergy, you then need to reintroduce cow's milk protein into your own diet to see if the symptoms return. Only then can the cow's milk protein allergy be confirmed.⁷

Q. How do I exclude milk and milk products from my diet?

A: Milk and ingredient derived from milk can be found in a wide number of foods and beverages. To effectively eliminate cow's milk protein from your diet and introduce suitable replacements in order to meet your increased nutritional needs of breastfeeding you should seek the support of an accredited dietitian.⁷ ASCIA and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia do provide free fact sheets on how to avoid cow's milk from your diet and what milks would be suitable replacement for you:

[ASCIA Dietary Guide for CMPA](#)

[A&AA Food Allergen Cards](#)

Q: How quickly should my baby's symptoms resolve once I remove milk from my diet?

A: Although improvement may be seen after 3 days, it can take up to 4 weeks for symptoms to resolve.⁴

Q: Do I need to remove soy from my diet as well for a child with confirmed or suspected cow's milk protein allergy?

A: Cow's milk is one of the most common causes of allergic reactions in children and some children who react to cow's milk will also react to soy protein. If after the initial 2 to 4 week elimination of cow's milk from your diet there is no improvement you may be asked to then exclude soy. However, it is best to speak to your healthcare professional first because you may not meet your nutritional requirements without the support of a doctor or accredited dietitian.⁹

Q: What kind of foods should I eat more of or exclude when breastfeeding to reduce allergies for my baby?

A: Both mother and infant require essential nutrients to meet the demands of pregnancy, breastfeeding and early childhood development. Avoiding foods which can cause food allergy while breastfeeding or when introducing solids to your baby is not recommended. Research has shown that giving your baby the common allergy causing foods before they are one year of age can greatly reduce the risk of them developing an allergy to that food. Waiting until they are older before offering these foods will not prevent food allergy.¹ Women are recommended to consume a healthy diet during pregnancy and breastfeeding, including plenty of fibre, fruits and vegetables. There is some evidence that consuming oily fish up to three times a week may help prevent eczema in early life which itself will help reduce the development of food allergy.^{1,8}

Q: Should I be taking any supplements when I eliminate milk from my diet?

A: Breastfeeding mothers who are removing cow's milk from their diet should consider taking a calcium and vitamin D supplement daily to support their nutritional needs.⁴ It is best to discuss supplementation and your individual requirements with your healthcare professional prior to supplementing.

Q: Should I take probiotics; will this help reduce my baby's symptoms?

A: Whilst there is some evidence that probiotics during pregnancy and breastfeeding may help prevent eczema in early life, it is still unclear on what specific probiotics or the optimal dosage.¹ More research in this area is required before any clear recommendations can be made.¹

Q: I am on a milk-free diet, what alternatives for milk are suitable & which are not suitable?

A: There are many alternative milks available for you to use instead of cow's milk, such as soy, almond, oat and rice milks. It is important you choose one which is fortified in calcium, containing at least 120mg per 100ml. Mammalian milk such as goat and sheep milks are not suitable as the proteins within are very similar to cow's milk protein so your baby may also react to these. Lactose-free cow's milk is not suitable as it still contains the cow's milk protein. An accredited dietitian will be able to help you choose the most appropriate milk for you.⁵

Q: If I wanted to start offering formula feeds with a specialised formula appropriate for CMPA which one is the most appropriate?

A: An extensively hydrolysed protein-based formula is the recommended first step alternative for infants with suspected or confirmed CMPA (unless the child has experienced anaphylaxis).² Soy protein formula, if tolerated, is an option beyond 6 months of age. Nutritional counseling and regular monitoring from your healthcare professional is highly recommended.²

Q: My baby has colic if I remove milk from my diet will this help reduce colicky symptoms?

A: Although colic can be a symptom of cow's milk protein allergy, it is important to speak to your GP, maternal child health nurse or Paediatrician who will be able to make sure there is no other cause for their pain and crying. Your baby may be experiencing colic without CMPA. Always speak with your healthcare professional before removing any food group from your diet.

Q: What can I have instead of milk and milk products to get enough protein in my diet?

A: Protein is an important part of a healthy balanced diet, helping to maintain and repair muscle and assist in producing a healthy milk supply when you are breastfeeding.⁵ Milk, cheese, yoghurt, and other milk products are all good sources of protein, however since these must be avoided and milk replacements can have a lower protein content, make sure you are eating other high

protein sources that are safe to eat on the elimination diet such as meat, chicken, turkey, fish, eggs and legumes. If you are unsure about your protein intake or require additional help speak to your healthcare professional or dietitian directly.⁵

Q: How do I get enough calcium in my diet if I remove milk?

A: Calcium is important for maintaining healthy bones and is also involved in breastmilk production. Breastfeeding mothers require between 1000 and 1300mg of calcium per day. If you are not able to meet these increased requirements through your diet, your body will remove some calcium from your bones to make breastmilk. This could increase your risk of osteoporosis. It is therefore important you replace cow's milk with other calcium rich foods in your diet.

Choose milk alternatives like soy, almond, rice or oat milk that are fortified with at least 120mg of calcium per 100ml. You can also include other food sources of calcium such as calcium fortified non-dairy cheese or yoghurt, broccoli, green leafy vegetables, dates, salmon or sardines with bones and juices fortified with calcium. Always check the food label and ingredients list for milk products. If you are not able to meet your calcium requirements a calcium supplement may be required.

Top tip:

Your body needs vitamin D to absorb calcium so try choosing milk replacements which are also fortified in vitamin D or if you need to start a calcium supplement choose one which also contains vitamin D.

If you are unsure if you are getting enough always talk with your healthcare professional regarding supplementation or seeing a dietitian.⁵

Q: I have tried to elimination diet, but my baby's symptoms have not improved. What should I do next?

A: If your baby's symptoms do not improve despite following a strict CMP-free diet, contact your healthcare provider. For some infant's, proteins other than cow's milk may cause allergic reactions. Prior to eliminating any other foods, discuss this with your healthcare provider. In most cases the mother will be encouraged and supported to continue breast-feeding while eliminating the suspected causative foods from her diet.² ■

References:

¹ ASCIA. Guidelines Infant Feeding and Allergy Prevention [internet]. Australia; 2020 [cited 2022 April 25]: <https://allergy.org.au/hp/papers/infant-feeding-and-allergy-prevention/>

² Koletzko et al. Diagnostic Approach and Management of Cow's-Milk Protein Allergy in Infants and Children: ESPGHAN GI Committee Practical Guidelines. JPGN. 2012;55(2):221-v229.

³ Vandenplas et al. Guidelines for the diagnosis and management of cow's milk protein allergy in infants Arch Dis Child 2007; 92:902-908.

⁴ Ludman et al. Managing Cow's Milk Allergy in Children. BMJ 2013; 347:5424.

⁵ McMasters Children's Hospital, What to eat while breastfeeding when your baby has a cow's milk protein allergy, 2014, <http://infinitypediatrics.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Infinity-Pediatrics-CMPA-Breastfeeding.pdf>

⁶ The Breastfeeding Network, Cows' Milk Protein Allergy (CMPA) and Breastfeeding, 2019, <https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/cows-milk-protein-allergy-cmpa-and-breastfeeding/>

⁷ Meyer et al. Diagnosis and management of Non-IgE gastrointestinal allergies in breastfed infants - An EACCI Position Paper. Allergy. 2020;75:14-32.

⁸ ASCIA. Dietary Guide for Food Allergy Cow's Milk Protein (Dairy) and Soy [internet]. Australia; 2021 [cited 2022 April 25]: https://www.allergy.org.au/images/pcc/ASCIA_PCC_Dietary_avoidance_cows_milk_soy_July_2021.pdf

BREASTMILK IS BEST FOR BABIES: Professional advice should be followed before using an infant formula. Partial bottle feeding could negatively affect breastfeeding. Good maternal nutrition is important for breastfeeding and reversing a decision not to breastfeed may be difficult. Infant formula should be used as directed. Improper use of infant formula may affect the health of the baby. Social and financial implications should be considered.