

Food Sensitivities in Breastfed Babies

If a breastfeeding baby is fussy, one of the questions a mother will often ask is whether her baby is allergic to something that she is eating. In recent years, it has become increasingly common for a breastfeeding mother to be told that her baby is sensitive to something in her diet.

- A true food allergy is a result of the immune system reacting to a food. The immune system responds by releasing defense chemicals that cause an inflammatory response.
- A food intolerance is when a baby has symptoms after eating a food, but does not develop a true immune response.

We often do not know for sure whether a baby has a food allergy, or a food intolerance, so we call it a “food sensitivity”.

The majority of infants who react to a food outgrow it by age three. Whether they had a true allergic reaction to a food, or a food intolerance, most children will not remain sensitive to the food that troubled them as a baby as they get older.

Why are more mothers being told their babies are sensitive to certain foods?

- It may be that health care providers are recognizing that fussiness or “colic” is often cured by dietary changes. Whatever the reason for fussiness, it is important to keep in mind that breastfeeding is still the best nutrition possible for a baby.

Why do most children outgrow a food sensitivity?

- It may be that as the immune system of a baby matures, the inflammatory response decreases. And, as the digestive tract matures, it becomes less easy for foreign substances to enter the body.

What are the most common symptoms of a food sensitivity?

- Eczema
- Fussiness
- Reflux (spitting up)
- Very liquid stools, stools with mucus, or infrequent stools (< one per day)
- Respiratory congestion
- Blood in the stool

None of the above symptoms are **always** indicative of a food sensitivity. Food sensitivities are complicated and not well understood, even by the experts.

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Breastfed babies can also be fussy because they are underfed, over fed or their mom has too much milk – resulting in excess intake of the low-fat “foremilk” (See our information on **Abundant Supply**). Some babies may also exhibit an inability to calm themselves in the early months, resulting in more fussiness (See our information on **Soothing Your Baby**). Bloody stools indicate an irritation of the colon, but not all colon irritation is from a food sensitivity.

Physicians often diagnose a baby with a “food sensitivity” and send a mom to MilkWorks for more information. The breastfeeding educators at MilkWorks are not capable of diagnosing, nor treating, a food sensitivity. Our board certified lactation consultants (IBCLCs) have the ability to share basic information and provide limited support to mothers, however, they do not have a guaranteed cure for a food sensitivity. Some mothers find they learn the most from other mothers.

Dr. Leeper, our breastfeeding medicine specialist, has years of experience with food sensitivities in breastfed babies, but is available for consultations in Lincoln on a very limited basis. Unfortunately there are no reliable tests to diagnose a food sensitivity; it is up to a breastfeeding mother to determine what will help her baby, often by trial and error.

In OUR experience, the most common food sensitivities in breastfed babies are:

- Cow’s milk
- Soy
- Corn
- Wheat
- Eggs
- Beef
- Rice
- Nuts

Because cow’s milk is the most common food sensitivity in infants, we have a list of terms that indicate the presence of cow’s milk components or ingredients. This is especially helpful if you eat processed foods. The list may be found in our Breastfeeding Information Center. You may stop by for this information or visit our web site (www.milkworks.org).

MilkWorks also carries high quality probiotics for mothers and babies and **we have a Facebook group (MilkWorks Food Intolerance)** for parents of babies with food sensitivities. It is led by a breastfeeding educator and is designed for parents to share coping techniques and recipes with each other. It is not meant to diagnose or treat a baby with a food sensitivity. We highly recommend that you consult with your baby’s physician for a diagnosis and treatment.

For more information, you may want to read ***Dealing with Food Allergies in Babies and Children*** by Janice Joneja, PhD. It is very comprehensive and addresses all aspects of food allergies. It is available at MilkWorks for \$22.95, or at the Lincoln City Libraries.

An additional resource is: <http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/MCAH/Pages/BreastfeedingFoodSensitivity.aspx>