

Milk-free for breastfeeding mothers

A guide to being milk-free when breastfeeding a baby with milk allergy



A food allergy is an abnormal response of the immune system to an otherwise harmless food. Usually, the response is to a protein, called an allergen. A reaction can occur within minutes or a few hours after the food is eaten and may lead to many different symptoms including hives, swelling around the mouth, asthma, diarrhoea, vomiting and eczema.

If you are breastfeeding a baby with allergies, you may be advised to avoid eating the offending food, as traces of the food protein do end up in breast milk. One of the most common food allergens is cow's milk. Fortunately, most children tend to outgrow their milk allergy. Approximately 80 percent of children outgrow their milk allergy by the age of three- to four- years.

It is very important that you eat well while breastfeeding. Healthy food and rest are what your body requires to avoid getting exhausted and rundown.

- Trial a milk-free diet for 1-2 weeks. If you don't see any improvements go back to your usual diet. Over this time it is a good idea to keep a simple food diary, recording any symptoms your baby may experience and the food and drinks you have had in that day. This may help pinpoint a problem food. However, it is important that you remove all milk and milk products at this time. You may need help from a health professional to do this. If you suspect other foods could be causing problems discuss this with your Plunket Nurse, GP or a Dietitian.
- If you see an improvement in your baby's symptoms continue to follow a milk-free diet until you are ready to wean your baby.
- If there is a family history of allergies it is best to exclusively breastfeed and to delay introducing solids until your baby is six months old. Your baby should avoid milk, soy and eggs until s/he is at least one-year-old and peanuts until three-years-old. Talk to your Plunket Nurse or a Registered Dietitian if you have any questions.
- It is important when following a milk-free diet that you include other foods that contain calcium.

What to Eat?

Follow the **Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Breastfeeding Women:**

- Choose a variety of foods from the four food groups each day.
- Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits. Choose at least three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit each day.

This information is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor or individual consultation with a Registered Dietitian. This information may only be used in its entirety.

Code: NUT0079

Date: October 2005, authorised by the Nutrition and Physical Activity Team, Community and Public Health

- Eat plenty of breads and cereals – including rice, pasta, breakfast cereals and other grain products. Choose at least seven servings of breads and cereals each day.
- Breastfeeding women need sufficient protein and calcium from their diet. Choose at least three servings of a milk alternative eg. A serving = 1 cup of soymilk, 150g soy yoghurt, two scoops of soy ice cream. If you are worried about genetic modification, use certified organic soymilk.
- Choose at least two servings from the meat and meat alternatives group. These include lean meats, chicken, seafood, eggs, cooked dried beans peas or lentils.

For more information read “Eating for Healthy Breastfeeding Women”. Code 6003, Ministry of Health, available from your local public health unit.

Shopping Guide – Avoiding Milk and Milk Products

Milk and milk products appear in many forms. When you are shopping you need to avoid the following ingredients: -

Cow’s milk	Condensed milk
Goat’s milk	Milk powder
Cheese	Buttermilk
Cottage cheese	Sour cream
Ricotta cheese	Quark
Chocolate	Margarine containing milk solids
Cream	Dairy food
Butter	Yoghurt
Ice cream	Cream cheese
Evaporated milk	

Your eating plan can be more varied, more easily prepared and less of a problem if you learn to look for “MILK WORDS” on the labels of food products. Since December 2002, New Zealand’s food labelling laws require that the most common allergenic foods be stated on food labels. Check the ingredient list on the labels of food products. Do not eat if they contain any of the following: -

Milk	Calcium caseinate	Casein
Margarine	Potassium caseinate	Cheese
Dried milk solids	Sodium caseinate	Curds
Whey	Butter	Lactalbumin

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Guide for shopping

Foods that do not contain milk or milk products	Foods that need to be checked. By law all food products should have a full ingredients list
Fruit and vegetables (without sauces and batters) Fresh meat and chicken (without sauces and batters) Eggs Spreads e.g. jam, honey, golden syrup, vegemite, marmite Cooking oils Boiled sweets, potato crisps and nuts Cordials, juices, soft drinks, tea, coffee	Sausages, luncheon meats and salami Bread and rolls – most breads are OK Breakfast cereals – most are OK Biscuits – most crackers are OK Drinks e.g. Drinking chocolate, Milo Processed foods e.g. Confectionery, packaged soups and sauces

There are many foods that can replace milk and milk products: -

Foods To Avoid	Replacement foods
Cows' milk, powdered milk, evaporated milk, condensed milk Buttermilk Yoghurt and dairy food Ice cream Cottage cheese and ricotta cheese Hard cheeses Cream, sour cream Butter, ghee	Soy milk, powdered coconut milk Soft tofu Soft tofu Gelato, fruit sorbets, milk-free ice blocks or soy ice cream e.g. <i>Lite Licks</i> Soft tofu Firm tofu Cheese made from Feta (goats milk) Coconut cream, soft tofu, tahini (sesame paste) Milk free margarine – always check the label

Tips to Follow

- ✓ Be particularly careful when choosing margarine. Sometimes a brand has two types – one containing milk solids and one without.
- ✓ Be careful of homemade foods such as biscuits, puddings, sauces and soups. These are OK if made without milk or milk products.
- ✓ Sometimes a “light” version differs from a full fat version with the same name. One could be milk-free while the other contains milk ingredients.
- ✓ Food manufacturers sometimes change the ingredients in their products so always check the ingredients list
- ✓ In some babies, milk can cause a topical, local or systemic reaction by skin contact. Always wash your hands after cooking or handling milk or milk containers.
- ✓ The New Zealand Therapeutic Database produces commercial food lists (lists of “safe food”). This includes a milk-free product list. NZTD can be visited on the internet at www.nztd.co.nz
- ✓ Another good source of advice and support is the Allergy Awareness Association phone: 09 303 2024 or e-mail: help@allergy.org.nz

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Your calcium needs

It can be difficult meeting your daily calcium requirement if you are avoiding milk and milk products. Women who are breastfeeding have a very high calcium requirement.

Usually a breastfeeding woman on a milk-free diet will require a calcium supplement. You can check by doing a quick calculation of your daily intake of calcium-rich foods.

The recommended daily intake for a breastfeeding woman is 1200mg.

Calcium content of basic foods

Food	APPROXIMATE SERVING SIZE	CALCIUM (MG)
Spinach, boiled	1 cup	269
Sardines, canned	4 sardines	264
Soy milk, fortified	1 glass	232
Almonds, whole*	½ cup	195
Tofu, cubes	3 x 2.5cm	131
Baked beans in tomato sauce	1 cup	127
Silverbeet, boiled	1 cup	114
Salmon, canned*	½ medium can	86
Broccoli, boiled	1 cup	59
Peanuts, roasted*	½ cup	44
Walnuts*	½ cup	35
Muesli (if containing nuts)*	½ cup	30
Lentils, cooked	1 cup	26
Sesame seeds	2 tablespoons	22
Bread, wholemeal	2 medium slices	18

****These products are not recommended if there is a strong family history of allergy because of the risk of becoming sensitised to fish and nuts.***

Calcium Supplements

Most pharmacies have a good range of calcium supplements. Choose a calcium supplement rather than a multivitamin supplement, which usually contain only a small amount of calcium.

If you are not meeting the recommended daily allowance choose a calcium supplement that provides 500-1000mg per day. Always take your calcium supplement in the evening as one of the hormones necessary for calcium absorption rises over night. If you are also taking an iron supplement take this in the morning, as the supplements can interfere with each other and decrease absorption.

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