Caring for Your Child
Breastfeeding the Baby with Food Allergies

If you have been told that your breastfed infant has food allergies, you may be wondering what to do next. Will you be able to continue to breastfeed? You may be surprised to learn that in most cases, the answer is yes.

Even a baby who has never been formula fed, and has never had any food besides breast milk may show signs of food allergy including: diarrhea, bloody stools, vomiting, colic, eczema, constipation and poor growth. Babies can develop allergies to foods that you are eating while you are breastfeeding. Proteins from the foods that you eat can appear in your milk within three to six hours after eating them. If you eliminate these foods from your diet, the proteins will disappear from your breast milk in one to two weeks and the baby’s symptoms should slowly improve. There are no recommendations to avoid any food while you are breastfeeding to prevent allergies. These restrictions are only recommended for breastfed babies who have developed symptoms.

Common foods that cause allergies are:

dairy (all forms of cow’s milk, including milk, cheese, yogurt and ice cream)
eggs
soy
wheat
peanuts
nuts

Remember that any food could potentially cause an allergy. The challenge is discovering which foods your baby is allergic to. Allergy testing in young infants is often not reliable. One way to determine which foods are a problem for your baby is to keep a food diary of the foods you eat along with a record of your baby’s symptoms. You may see a pattern develop of worsening symptoms whenever you eat certain foods.

Often it is enough to just remove all dairy from your diet. You will need to carefully read all food labels to eliminate foods that might contain dairy. Milk is considered a major food allergen under the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2006. All food products containing milk as an ingredient must list the word “Milk” on the product label. If you are unsure about any product, confirm ingredients with the manufacturer. For more information about food labeling laws, go to www.foodallergy.org.
Look for the following words on food labels and avoid any of these foods:

Artificial butter flavor Lactoglobulin
Butter, butterfat, butter oil Lactalbumin
Buttermilk Lactoferrin
Casein Lactulose
Caseinates Milk
Cheese Nougat
Cream Pudding
Cottage cheese Recaldenet
Curds Rennet casein
Custard Sour cream
Dry milk solids Sour milk solids
Ghee Whey
Half & half Yogurt

Other ingredients that may be clues to the presence of milk protein include:

Caramel candies
Chocolate
Flavorings
High protein flour
Lactic acid starter
Lactose
Lunch meat, hot dogs, sausages
Margarine
Non-dairy products

You can have a well balanced diet even without eating any dairy. You can get plenty of protein from fish, beef, chicken, eggs, nuts and beans. You can use calcium fortified soy milk, rice milk or fortified orange juice to supply you with 1000 mg of calcium each day, or you can take a calcium supplement. You will also want to continue taking a multivitamin. Be sure to read the labels on your vitamins and any medications that you are taking. They may also contain hidden allergens.

It can take a month or more for the baby’s symptoms to improve. If your baby shows no signs of improvement or his symptoms get worse after a month of the dairy-free diet, you may need to eliminate other foods such as wheat, eggs, soy, peanuts or nuts. Sometimes babies are allergic to more than one food. You may need to stay on this restricted diet the entire time you are breastfeeding, or until your infant is one year old. Many babies outgrow their food allergies by their first birthday.

Breast milk provides important health benefits for your baby including protection from infections and higher IQ scores, and a reduction in chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity. Breastfeeding creates a special bond between mother and baby and many babies enjoy breastfeeding into the second year of life. There is no reason to wean your baby from the breast if your baby develops signs of food allergies. If you change your diet, you and your baby should be able to enjoy breastfeeding until you are both ready to wean.