



ILCA's INSIDE TRACK

a resource for breastfeeding mothers

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Only a Few Babies Have Problems With Foods Their Mothers Eat

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Many mothers who breastfeed worry that their baby is fussy because of something they have eaten. They may have heard of other mothers having this problem. They may have been told not to eat certain foods. Some mothers have even been told their baby may be “allergic” to their milk. The good news is that most babies do not have a problem with the food their mother eats. Most mothers can eat many types of food. Most mothers who breastfeed do not need to change their diet.

Sometimes a baby can be bothered by a food his mother eats. He is not allergic to his mother’s milk, but he can react to something she eats. This does not happen very often in babies. When it does happen, it can last until the baby is much older. Sometimes it does not go away at all. Most mothers can keep breastfeeding if they stop eating the food that bothers the baby. It can be hard to know what food your baby is reacting to. Your baby’s doctor or lactation consultant will try to help you find the food that is causing your baby’s reaction. Common signs of a food reaction in a baby are these:

- Fussiness
- Rash on face or body (eczema) or scalp (cradle cap)
- Constant runny nose
- Cough or wheezing
- Failure to gain weight well
- Stomach trouble like vomiting, hard poop, or diarrhea

Many types of foods can cause a bad reaction in your baby. Just a few foods cause most reactions: dairy, soy, egg, nuts, shellfish, and wheat.

Sometimes a baby is not allergic to the food. Instead he is just sensitive to a certain type of food. Most babies are only sensitive to foods when they are very young. How do you know if your baby has a problem with a food you are eating? There are many signs a baby can show. The signs can show up within a few hours of eating the food or can show up an entire day later.

Here are some signs that your baby may be sensitive to a food you ate:

- Is fussy and cries a lot
- Does not sleep well
- Spits up more
- Gags or has reflux
- Has hard stool that is hard for the baby to get out
- Has blood or mucous in the stool
- Fusses a lot when he is eating

Many healthy babies will have a few signs from this list off and on. This is not something to worry about unless the baby is unhappy or not gaining weight well. Most of the babies with food problems will have many of these signs, not just one or two. And the signs get worse as the weeks go by.

What foods are most likely to cause a sensitivity?



- Dairy foods. Cow's milk protein is the most common food problem in babies. Dairy foods include milk, cheese, ice cream, and butter. Dairy is often listed on food labels as whey or casein. It can be in foods, like bread, that you would not think of as a dairy food. Sensitivity to dairy protein is not the same as lactose intolerance, which causes gas and diarrhea in people who have trouble digesting the sugar in milk. Lactose intolerance is more common in adults. It is rare in babies and young children.
- Soy foods. About half of babies who have trouble with cow's milk protein will also have trouble with soy protein. Soy is known as tofu or edamame and can be found in a lot of prepared foods. It will be listed as soy protein isolate or soy flour on the label.
- Grains like wheat, corn, and oats
- Peanuts or tree nuts (almond, pecan, walnut, etc)
- Fish or shellfish

A very few babies will be sensitive to foods with citrus (oranges and grapefruit) or high acid (pineapple or tomatoes) or to chocolate.

If you think your baby has problems with foods you eat, see an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) who has helped other mothers and babies with this kind of problem. The lactation consultant may want you to bring a list of all the foods and drinks you consume over a few days. She may also want you to keep track of how your baby acts.

Once you think a certain food is the problem, stop eating that food. You will need to

stop eating anything made with that food, too. Most foods are gone from your body in a few days. It will take a week or two for cow's milk protein to leave your body and your baby's body. Watch your baby to see whether the problems get better when you stop eating the food for a few days. Then add that food back into your diet to see whether baby has problems again. If your baby's doctor has told you that your baby has an allergy, ask the baby's doctor before you eat that food again.

It can be very trying when you think your baby is having problems with the food you eat. Some of the signs that your baby is having a problem can indicate either allergy or sensitivity. A lactation consultant and your baby's doctor will help you to find out what you can do to help your baby. A dietitian can also help if you need to stop eating more than one type of food. This way you will get the good food you need to stay healthy while you continue breastfeeding.

Call your baby's doctor right away if your baby has any of these signs

- Has trouble breathing or "wheezes"
- Cries all the time
- Is not gaining weight or is losing weight
- Has a bad rash that does not go away
- Always has a runny nose or cough
- Starts to vomit often (a large forceful spit-up)
- Has blood in his stool