

Food sensitivities in breastfed babies

How closely do I need to watch what I eat?

Most babies have no problems with anything that mom eats. It's generally recommended that you eat whatever you like, whenever you like, in the amounts that you like and continue to do this unless you notice an obvious reaction in your baby.

There is no list of "foods that every nursing mom should avoid" because most nursing mothers can eat anything they want, and because the babies who *are* sensitive to certain foods are each unique - what bothers one may not bother another.

Normal baby fussiness

Most infant fussiness is normal for a young baby, and is not related to foods in mom's diet. If your baby is sensitive to something you are eating, you will most likely notice other symptoms in addition to fussiness, such as excessive spitting up or vomiting, colic, rash or persistent congestion. Fussiness that is not accompanied by other symptoms and calms with more frequent nursing is probably not food-related.

Possible signs of food allergy

A small percentage of breastfeeding mothers notice an obvious difference in their baby's behavior and/or health when they eat certain foods. Cow's milk products are the *most common* problem foods and the only foods conclusively linked by research to fussiness/gassiness in babies, but some babies do react to other foods. Food sensitivities in breastfed babies are not nearly as common as many breastfeeding mothers have been led to think, however.

If a breastfed baby is sensitive to a particular food, then he may be fussy after feedings, cry inconsolably for long periods, or sleep little and wake suddenly with obvious discomfort. There may be a family history of allergies. Other signs of a food allergy may include: rash, hives, eczema, sore bottom, dry skin; wheezing or asthma; congestion or cold-like symptoms; red, itchy eyes; ear infections; irritability, fussiness, colic; intestinal upsets, vomiting, constipation and/or diarrhea, or green stools with mucus or blood.

The severity of a food reaction is generally related to the degree of baby's sensitivity and to the amount of the problem food that mom ate—the more food eaten and the greater baby's sensitivity, the more severe the reaction. Food reactions may occur within minutes, but symptoms in breastfed babies more commonly show up 4-24 hours after exposure. If baby has an acute reaction to a new food, or to a food that mom ate a large amount of, then he will probably be back to normal within a couple of hours. If baby is sensitive to a food that mom eats frequently, symptoms may be ongoing.

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What foods are most likely to be a problem?

Some of the most likely suspects are *cow's milk products, soy, wheat, corn, eggs, and peanuts.*

Other suspect foods:

- Any food that a family member is allergic to
- A food that mom recently ate a large amount of
- A new food (if baby's symptoms are new)
- A food that mom doesn't like, but is eating while breastfeeding (and/or ate while pregnant) for the benefit of her baby
- A food that mom craves, or feels she has to have after a bad day

Conscious likes and dislikes of foods are signals that your body may be reacting to them in an abnormal way.

Keeping a food journal with a record of foods eaten and baby's behavior/symptoms, with time of day for each, may be helpful when trying to pinpoint a problem food.

What if a specific food appears to be a problem?

If you think your baby is reacting to a particular food, then eliminate that food from your diet for 2-3 weeks to see if baby's symptoms improve. If baby's symptoms do improve, then this food may be a problem for your baby. Eliminating a food for less than 2-3 weeks may not be effective—cow's milk protein, for example, can persist in mom's body for 1½ - 2 weeks, and it may be another 1½ - 2 weeks before the protein is out of baby's system.

Baby's symptoms will usually begin to improve within 5-7 days of eliminating a problem food. Your baby may not improve immediately, however, especially if the reaction is to a food that has been a regular part of mom's diet. Some babies seem to feel worse for about a week before symptoms begin to improve. Sometimes it takes several weeks to see an improvement.

One way to confirm that a particular food is a problem for your baby is to eat that food again to see whether baby has the same reaction. The more severe your baby's original symptoms, the longer you may wish to wait before reintroducing it into your diet—for a very severe reaction you may not reintroduce the food at all. If you reintroduce a food and your baby does *not* have the same reaction as before, then baby is probably not sensitive to that food. If he does react in the same way, you will want to limit or avoid this food for a time -- until baby is older or in some cases until baby has weaned.

If baby is only a little sensitive to a particular food, you may be able to simply limit the amount that you eat, rather than eliminate that food altogether. Most babies grow out of food sensitivities within several months to a year, but some food allergies persist long-term.

For more information and references, see www.kellymom.com/nutrition/

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