



## Food Allergies or 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. Lately, it has become common for a breastfeeding mother to be told that her baby is sensitive to something in her diet.

**A true food allergy** is a response of the immune system to a food. The immune system responds by releasing defense chemicals that cause an inflammatory response.

**A food intolerance** is when a baby reacts to a food, but does not develop an immune response. There is no consensus among experts as to whether a baby can truly develop a temporary food allergy, or whether infants actually usually develop a food intolerance, which is NOT a life long condition.

According to a recent British study, the majority of young children who react to a food outgrow it by age 3. Whether they had a true allergic reaction to the food, or merely an intolerance to a food, most of the children studied were not sensitive to the food as they got older.

**Why are more mothers being told their babies are sensitive to certain foods?** It may be that as more parents have allergies (hay fever, asthma, eczema), they are passing more genes for allergies to their babies. It may also be that health care providers are recognizing that “colic” is often cured by dietary changes. Whatever the reason, it is important to keep in mind that **breastfeeding is still the best nutrition possible for a baby.**

**Why do most children outgrow a sensitivity?** Most likely because as the immune system of a baby matures, the inflammatory response decreases. And, as the gastrointestinal tract matures, it becomes less easy for foreign substances to enter the body.

**What are the most common symptoms of a food sensitivity?**

- Eczema
- Colic
- Reflux
- Liquid frothy stools or infrequent stools
- Poor weight gain
- Respiratory congestion
- Blood in the stool

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

**Babies can be fussy** because they are underfed, over fed or their mom has an abundant milk supply resulting in excess intake of the foremilk. Some babies may also exhibit an inability to calm themselves in the early months, resulting in more fussiness. Bloody stools indicate an irritation of the colon, but not all colon irritation is from a food sensitivity.

The breastfeeding educators at MilkWorks are not capable of diagnosing, nor treating, a food sensitivity. Yet often physicians diagnose a baby with a “food allergy or sensitivity” and then send a mom to MilkWorks for information or “treatment”.

If you feel as though you are not getting a through diagnosis, along with follow up treatment and information from your physician, we recommend that you schedule an appointment with Dr. Leeper, our breastfeeding medicine specialist. She has been working exclusively with breastfeeding mothers for over 7 years.

You may also want to read a book that we carry called **Dealing with Food Allergies in Babies and Children** by Janice Jonega, PhD. It is very comprehensive and addresses all aspects of food allergies. It is available at MilkWorks for \$22.95.

**Because cow’s milk is the most common allergen for humans**, we do have a list of terms that indicate the presence of cow’s milk components or ingredients. This list may be found in our Parent Information Center, which may be accessed by stopping by MilkWorks or by visiting our web site [www.milkworks.org](http://www.milkworks.org).

**We also have a Food Intolerance Support Group.** It is led by a breastfeeding educator. This group is designed for parents to share coping techniques and recipes with each other. It is not designed to diagnose or treat a baby with a food sensitivity. We highly recommend that you work with a physician while participating in the group.

***MilkWorks is a Comprehensive Resource to Help You Breastfeed Your Baby***

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Parent Information Center – [www.milkworks.org](http://www.milkworks.org) – c2008