

Cow's Milk Free Diet for Infants

This leaflet should only be used in conjunction with advice from your Paediatric Dietitian

Why does my child need a cow's milk free diet?

Your baby may need a cow's milk free diet for 2 main reasons:

1. Cow's milk protein allergy or intolerance

It is not uncommon for babies to be allergic or intolerant to cow's milk. Symptoms can vary, but can include diarrhoea, vomiting, poor weight gain, facial swelling and skin rashes. The severity of these reactions can vary. A strict cow's milk free diet may be required for a short period or possibly years. Many babies outgrow their intolerance or allergy in their toddler years. You should discuss how to re-introduce cow's milk with your doctor or dietitian.

2. Lactose intolerance

Sometimes after a tummy bug, diarrhoea or gastroenteritis a baby can develop a temporary intolerance to lactose. This means that you baby may not be able to digest lactose, the sugar found in milk. As a result, they will need to be on a lactose-free formula for approximately 8 weeks. After this time a normal diet can usually be resumed, following advice from your dietitian.

Your baby should only be following a cow's milk free diet if recommended by a doctor or dietitian.

Milk substitutes – what should I give my baby?

Advice for breastfeeding Mums:

Breastfeeding provides your baby with the best nutrition and protection, as well as important benefits to your baby's digestion and immune system. The composition of your milk changes to meet the needs of your baby at different stages of development. The nutrients in breast milk are easily digested and absorbed, however your milk will contain lactose and may have traces of cow's milk protein.

If your baby has been diagnosed with cow's milk allergy and continues to have symptoms whilst being exclusively breastfed, you may be advised by your healthcare professional to avoid cow's milk products. This is to see if your baby's symptoms improve. If benefits are seen, the overall adequacy of your diet will also be assessed by the dietitian. A calcium supplement may be advised whilst you are excluding cow's milk products from your diet, as calcium requirements are higher (1250mg/day) when breastfeeding.

If you decide to stop breastfeeding and your child is under 1 year of age, then a specialist milk is required. Please seek advice from your baby's dietitian or doctor.

Advice for formula-fed babies

If your baby normally takes a standard infant formula, this will be replaced with a specialist cow's milk free infant formula. This formula will only be available on prescription from your baby's GP.

Information for Patients

The cow's milk free infant formula will provide all the nutrition your baby needs for the first 6 months.

The best milk substitute for your baby will depend on their age, type of symptoms they have experienced and also their taste preferences. Your baby's dietitian and/or doctor will be able to advise on which specialist milk free formula is best for them.

The recommended formula for your baby is:

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Please note that your baby's stools may change colour e.g. dark green, shortly after starting the new milk. This is normal and you should not be concerned.

What if my baby is refusing the new formula?

Cow's milk free infant formulas can taste and smell different from standard formulas but are generally well accepted by younger babies.

If your baby continues to refuse the new feed despite multiple attempts, you may want to consider the following:

- **Titrate the feed up gradually**
Start by replacing one scoop of your baby's normal formula with one scoop of the cow's milk free formula. At each feed, or as tolerated, increase the number of scoops of the cow's milk free formula by one, until you have replaced all the feed with milk free formula.
- **Addition of vanilla flavouring** - Add a small drop of vanilla flavouring to your baby's feed. This will help reduce the bitterness of the feed. Please check the label to ensure that the product does not contain alcohol.
- **Add to meals and sauces** – If your baby has already started weaning, try using the cow's milk free formula in meals, white sauces, custard or rice pudding.

How much milk substitute does my baby need?

During the introduction of solids, your baby's intake of breast milk and/or cow's milk free formula will likely decrease. Aim to give a minimum of 600ml (~1 pint) of milk substitute each day as a drink or in foods. This will ensure that your baby has an adequate calcium intake each day. If your baby is consistently taking less than 300ml per day, contact your dietitian for advice as they may need to start a calcium supplement.

What about other milk substitutes?

Soya based infant formulas are not available in the UK and not recommended under 6 months of age. Other mammalian milks, such as goat's milk and sheep's milk infant formula are also not suitable.

Supermarket milk alternatives such as oat, nut, rice and soya milks should not be used as a main substitute for babies under 1 year old, as they do not contain all the nutrients your baby requires.

Information for Patients

Calcium

Calcium is needed for healthy bones and teeth and the main source of calcium often comes from dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurts. Infants who are following a cow's milk free diet at weaning may find it difficult to get enough calcium from non-dairy calcium-rich foods.

Foods that contain calcium include dark green vegetables e.g. broccoli, spinach, cabbage, fortified breads and fortified breakfast cereals. Calcium enriched milk substitutes eg soya yoghurt. Sesame seeds are high in calcium, and tahini used in houmous is a sesame seed paste.

Vitamin D

We make Vitamin D in our skin by spending time outside and in the sunshine. We need Vitamin D to help our body use calcium. The main food sources of Vitamin D include; eggs, margarine and oily fish.

All infants who are breastfed longer than 6 months of age, or infants that take less than 500ml of infant formula each day, should have a daily multivitamin to ensure an adequate intake of vitamin D.

Food labelling

Many packaged and pre-prepared baby foods are cow's milk free and are therefore suitable for your baby. It is still however necessary to check food labels carefully for the following ingredients:

Cow's milk	Whey
Butter	Skimmed milk powder
Butter milk	Casein
Margarine	Caseinates
Cheese	Curd
Cream	Ghee
Crème fraiche	Milk solids
Ice-cream	Milk protein
Fromage frais	Milk powder
Yoghurt	Lactose

Examples of food labels containing milk products:

Cooked vegetables with rice (baby jar)

Carrots*, Tomatoes, Potatoes, Onions, Cooked Rice, **Skimmed Milk, Cream, Skimmed Milk Powder, Butter**, Rapeseed Oil.

Creamy porridge (powdered baby food)

Rice, Corn, Demineralised **Whey Powder (from Milk), Skimmed Milk Powder**, Vegetable Fat, Vanilla Flavouring, Cinnamon.

Food Labelling: 'May contain'

The statement 'may contain' is often used on food packaging to indicate that a food product may have been contaminated with a common allergen. This can include cow's milk. It is recommended that your infant avoids these foods when following a milk free diet.

Information for Patients

Remember: If in doubt, leave it out and avoid!

Unlabelled foods

Be careful when choosing unlabelled food such as bread and delicatessen foods. Ask at the counter for details about individual products and what they contain to ensure they are milk free.

Eating Out

It can be difficult to follow a milk free diet when eating out at a restaurant, at a friend's house or party. The key is to try and plan ahead.

If you are planning to eat out or your baby is going to a relative or friend's house, remember to call ahead to the restaurant or speak with the relative/ friend. This will help ensure suitable meal options are available.

Weaning / Introducing Solids

You should start introducing solid foods at 6 months of age. However, all babies are different and if you are considering starting earlier please discuss this with your health visitor or dietitian.

A baby that requires a cow's milk free diet should be weaned in the same way, except all foods should be free from cow's milk or cow's milk products.

Suitable foods from 6 months:

- Fruit – stewed and puree or finely mashed e.g. banana, pear, apple and peach.
- Milk free baby rice made with milk substitute.
- Vegetables – soft cooked and mashed e.g. potato, cauliflower, broccoli, carrot and parsnips. You can add dairy free margarine.
- Sauces and puddings – make white sauces or custards with a milk substitute.

When your baby is taking solids well, you can increase the variety of foods offered:

- Pureed meats e.g. chicken, lamb, beef, turkey and pork.
- Flaked fish
- Pureed pulses e.g. lentils

Remember – all food should be prepared without added sugar or salt.

Sample menu options for older infant

Breakfast

- Cereal (soft) with milk substitute
- Toast with dairy free margarine

Lunch and dinner

- Minced or soft cooked meat
- Pasta, rice or potato
- Scrambled egg
- Flaked fish made in a milk free white sauce
- Sandwich with milk free filling e.g. soya cheese or spread
- Soft cooked vegetables and fruit

Information for Patients

Desserts

- Rice pudding made with milk substitute
- Jelly
- Soya yoghurts or desserts
- Dairy free custard

Snacks

- Bread sticks / crackers
- Pitta toast
- Rice cakes
- Fruit / dried fruit
- Vegetable sticks (soft)
- Milk free biscuits

Recipe Ideas - Cow's milk free

Milk substitutes and milk-free margarine can be used to create many items that usually contain milk. There are many ideas for recipes available online and your formula manufacturer's website will also provide ideas.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Will my infant be able to stay for nursery dinner?

A. Yes, this should not be a problem. Your child's nursery should be able to give you access to the menu and allergy information. If required speak to the Dietitian who can liaise with the nursery or school cook to give information on appropriate choices.

Q. What happens if milk containing foods are eaten?

A. It depends on your baby's symptoms. Some children experience skin problems with dairy foods, others tummy upset. In the majority of cases a small amount should cause little harm. However, a minority of children are severely intolerant and being vigilant is all you can do.

Q. Will my infant grow out of their allergy/intolerance?

A. Yes, many infants outgrow their intolerance or allergy in their toddler years. It can however take until they are 5 years old to fully outgrow their allergy or intolerance to cow's milk.

Q. When can I reintroduce milk into my child's diet?

A. This can vary considerably between infants. You should discuss when and how to reintroduce cow's milk products with your doctor or dietitian.

Q. I would like to have another baby. What is the chance that they will also have an allergy or intolerance to cow's milk?

A. There is a chance that siblings may have an allergy or intolerance to cow's milk; however this is not always the case. Infants that have one or more parent with an atopic history of allergy or hay-fever may have an increased risk. Monitor your new baby as normal and seek further advice if needed.

For further information please contact the Paediatric Dietitians on 0121 424 1674.

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