

## Cow's milk free diet for breastfeeding mums

This dietary advice sheet helps you to make the recommended changes to your diet while you are breastfeeding, and your child still has a cow's milk allergy.

Your GP or allergy specialist (dietitian/paediatrician/allergy nurse) will provide a separate [dietary advice sheet for your child](#) (click on this link if you are viewing this from your phone/tablet/computer). *Please tell your GP/allergy specialist if you don't have access to the internet and need a paper version of this.*

### What is cow's milk allergy?

**Cow's milk allergy is when the body's immune system reacts to the proteins found in cow's milk. It is also called cow's milk protein allergy (CMPA).** Many foods and drinks contain cow's milk protein, including the normal infant formula milks sold in the UK. There are **two types of cow's milk allergy**:

- **Delayed onset – also called non IgE mediated:** this is *the most common type*, where symptoms come on from 2 hours up to 2 or 3 days after having anything with cow's milk protein in it. Generally, there will be more than one symptom that affects the skin and/or digestive system, for example eczema, diarrhoea, constipation, reflux and blood in stools. *Most children with this type of cow's milk allergy will grow out of it between the age of 1–2 years.*
- **Acute/immediate onset – also called IgE mediated:** this is where symptoms come on quickly, generally within minutes (but could be up to 2 hours) after having anything with cow's milk protein in it. Symptoms can affect the skin such as red and itchy hives and sudden flare ups, and the digestive system such as immediate vomiting or diarrhoea. ***In a small number of cases a particular type of reaction called anaphylaxis may occur - if you notice symptoms of anaphylaxis, such as swelling of the lips or tongue or breathing difficulties, seek immediate medical help as this can be life threatening.*** Most children with this type of cow's milk allergy will grow out of it by the age of 5 - but for the most severe, the allergy may be lifelong.

More information about cow's milk allergy can be found on Allergy UK's website, [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org) (help line 01322 619898).

### If your child has a cow's milk allergy, breastfeeding remains the best way to feed them.

Breastfeeding is the first line treatment for babies with a cow's milk allergy. If it is suspected that your child is reacting to cow's milk protein via breast milk, you should follow a cow's milk free diet for up to 6 weeks. *Continue to breastfeed throughout this time – you don't need to express and discard (pump and throw away) your milk initially when you begin the exclusion diet.* If your child's symptoms don't improve after the 6 weeks, please see your GP/healthcare professional, as it is unlikely to be a cow's milk allergy.

### Why have you been asked to exclude cow's milk from your diet?

*Please tell your healthcare professional if your child did not have any symptoms when you were solely breastfeeding and including cow's milk products in your diet. This will mean that you can continue breastfeeding without having to exclude cow's milk products from your own diet. You will just need to ensure your child has a cow's milk free diet if they have started to have solid foods, and if any top up formula is required it will need to be an appropriate prescribed formula.*

Some milk proteins from your diet can pass through breast milk and cause symptoms of cow's milk allergy in your child. *However, because only a very small amount of milk proteins pass through breast milk, it is when infant formula or solid foods are started (also known as weaning) that a child with a cow's milk allergy is more likely to experience symptoms.*

## Local breastfeeding/infant feeding support

- **Hertfordshire residents:** contact health visiting on 0300 123 7572 and your GP can also refer you to the Herts Infant Feeding Service.
- **West Essex residents:** contact health visiting on 0300 247 0122 (Switchboard, Essex Child & Family Wellbeing Service).

## Cow's milk free diet

For you to have a cow's milk free (also known as dairy free) diet, you will need to avoid cow's milk, yoghurts, cheese and any products that contain these. **Other animal milks such as goat, buffalo and sheep are not suitable as your child is likely to react to these. Lactose free products are also not suitable alternatives as they still contain milk proteins.**

**A growing number of products sold as vegan now contain a warning that they are not suitable for those with a milk allergy.** This may be due to the possibility of cross contamination (may have been made in a facility that handles cow's milk products and may contain traces). In addition, for some products manufactured abroad, the manufacturing process may include a genetically engineered ingredient that is very similar to cow's milk protein, which may result in allergy symptoms. **It is important to always check the label.**

Cow's milk is found in many foods. Some foods are obvious sources, but many foods contain hidden sources. When you go shopping it is important to check the labels of foods carefully to make sure that they don't contain any milk. **Any milk ingredient present in pre-packaged foods must be highlighted in bold on the ingredient panel of the food label.** *Where food is made on premises, sold unpackaged and the seller information is unclear, do not take the risk. Remember also that manufacturers can change the ingredients without warning.* Most supermarkets will provide a list of their cow's milk free foods on request. Supermarket apps/online ordering services also provide information on each product.

## Carefully check food labels for the following ingredients and AVOID:

Obvious sources of cow's milk	Hidden sources of cow's milk
<p>Cow's milk (fresh/UHT), buttermilk, powdered milk, condensed milk, evaporated milk, cream/artificial cream, crème fraiche, cheese (all varieties), butter, butter oil, ghee, margarine/spread, fromage frais, ice cream, yoghurt.</p> <p><u>Please note:</u> Animal milks such as sheep, buffalo and goat's milk are <i>not</i> suitable alternatives to cow's milk.</p>	<p>Casein (curds), caseinates, calcium or sodium caseinate, hydrolysed casein, lactoglobulin, lactalbumin, lactose, lactose free products, coffee whitener, milk protein, milk sugar, milk solids, non-fat milk solids, modified milk, modified milk whey, whey, whey solids, whey protein, hydrolysed whey, hydrolysed whey sugar, hydrolysed whey protein, whey syrup sweetener.</p>

The following are **examples** (not a complete list) of **processed foods**, which **may contain milk** and will need to be checked carefully:

Breakfast cereals	Baked goods (e.g., rolls)	Soups
Pancakes, batters	Baby foods	Ready meals
Pasta & pizzas	Crisps	Sauces & gravies
Cakes, biscuits, crackers	Instant mashed potato	Chocolate/confectionery
Puddings & custards	Processed meats, e.g., luncheon meat, sausages etc.	

### Cow's milk free alternatives:

<b>Milks</b> – choose a fortified product, see below	Made from oat, soya, flaxseed, sesame, rice, pea, coconut, quinoa, hemp, potato & nut (e.g., almond* or hazelnut*)
<b>Spreads</b>	Milk free & vegan spreads
<b>Cheese</b>	Milk free cheese alternatives made from coconut, soya, pea, cashew*, almond* or rice protein - varieties such as hard, soft, melting or parmesan style
<b>Yoghurts &amp; desserts</b>	Made from soya, pea, coconut, almond*
<b>Ice creams &amp; frozen desserts</b>	Made from soya, rice, coconut, almond*, cashew*
<b>Creams</b>	Made from soya, oat, rice, coconut, almond*

**\*Avoid nut based alternatives if you have, or are at risk of, a nut allergy**

- **It is important that you replace cow's milk with a calcium enriched milk substitute. Ideally, look for milk substitutes that are also fortified with iodine, which supports your child's growth and development.**
- Note that organic versions of dairy free milk substitutes will *not* be fortified.
- Rice milk is also not suitable as a drink for children under the age of 5 years, but it is ok to have fortified rice milk yourself if you are breastfeeding.
- Children can react to soya as well as cow's milk. If necessary, your dietitian may initially recommend that you do not add *extra* soya products to your diet but instead concentrate on alternative cow's milk free options.

### Vitamin D and calcium

If you are breastfeeding, your daily vitamin D requirement is 10 micrograms or 400 International Units (IU) and your daily calcium requirement is 1250 mg. Vitamin D is mainly obtained from the action of sunlight on your skin, and in autumn and winter this is much less effective as the sunlight is not strong enough. It is also more difficult to meet your calcium needs from a cow's milk free diet but see below for examples of non-dairy sources of calcium. Calcium and vitamin D are essential for healthy bones, teeth and muscles.

*It is recommended that you take a daily vitamin D supplement providing 10 micrograms or 400 International Units (IU) vitamin D, and a daily calcium supplement providing 1000mg calcium (unless you are sure you can meet your calcium needs from your diet). **These supplements can both be bought from your local pharmacy, supermarket or online.***

## Cow's milk free sources of \*calcium in foods:

Glass of calcium enriched soya milk (280ml/½ pint)	336-364mg	White bread (40g/medium slice)	62mg
Glass of calcium enriched coconut or almond milk (280ml/½ pint)	336mg	Wholemeal bread (40g/medium slice)	42mg
Glass of calcium enriched rice or oat milk (280ml/½ pint)	336mg	Calcium fortified bread – e.g., Best of Both (40g/medium slice)	143mg
Tinned sardines – with bones (60g/½ can)	273-407mg	Dairy free yoghurt made from soya, fortified (100g)	120mg
Tinned salmon – red/pink with bones (106g)	174mg (red) 115mg (pink)	Dairy free yoghurt made from coconut, fortified (100g)	128mg
Calcium enriched dairy free soft cheese - e.g., Koko Dairy Free Soft Cream Cheese (30g)	60mg	Calcium enriched dairy free cheddar cheese - e.g., Koko Dairy Free Cheddar (30g)	220mg
Baked beans, canned in tomato sauce (100g)	42mg	Dried figs (1 fig/20g)	50mg
Broccoli, boiled (100g)	35mg	1 medium orange	29mg

\*Calcium content sources – McCance & Widdowson's *The Composition of Foods Integrated Dataset 2021*, and online retailers accessed 18/10/23

## Dietitian support

If your child has not seen or yet been referred to see a dietitian, please contact your GP or health visitor, who will refer them accordingly.

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