

Milk-free trial and re-challenge information for breastfed children on solids with suspected cow's milk protein allergy

Information for patients

Department of Nutrition & Dietetics – Royal Hospital for Children and Young People



Confirming/excluding cow's milk protein allergy (CMPA) whilst on weaning diet:

When your child has symptoms that may suggest CMPA, your health visitor may advise a milk-free trial.

A milk-free trial is usually for a period of 4-6 weeks and involves removing cow's milk and all milk products from your child's diet.

If you are breastfeeding and your diet contains dairy products we advise that you continue with this.

Getting all you need on a milk-free diet:

It is vital to ensure you get all the nutrients you need being milk-free. Taking cow's milk out of your diet means you are missing out on often the major source of calcium in the diet. Your baby will be getting calcium from your breast milk.

Avoidance of dairy includes cow's milk, yogurt, butter, cream and cheese. Other animal milks are not advised as they contain similar proteins to cow's milk which may cause an allergic response. From 6 months of age calcium fortified plant based milk such as oat, soya and coconut milk can be used in cooking and in cereal breast milk or allergy formula must be the main milk until 12 months or age. Rice milk should not be given to children under 5 years of age due to its arsenic content. You will also find plant based alternatives to yogurt, butter, cheese and cream in the free from section of the supermarket.

It is important to check food labels to ensure any foods given to your baby are completely free from cow's milk. Avoid foods which have 'milk' in bold on the label. If a product states 'may contain', you can give these to your child. When eating out, food outlets need to provide you with allergy information by law, so always ask.

Check with your pharmacist about tablets or medicines which may contain milk protein and/or lactose.

After the 4–6-week trial:

Once you have completed the trial, it is important to reintroduce milk back into your child's diet. If there has been no change to symptoms during this trial, it is highly unlikely that your child has CMPA. If there has been some improvement, it is still vital to confirm CMPA by reintroducing milk back into your diet. This is done over the course of 5 days.

1. **DO NOT** start the re-challenge if your child is unwell: e.g. any respiratory or breathing problems (this includes a common cold) any tummy, bowel or teething symptoms, if your child has atopic dermatitis/eczema – any current flare-up of the skin.
2. **DO NOT** stop any medication that your child may be on e.g. reflux medicine, laxatives.
3. Please wait 7 days after any immunisations before starting the re-challenge.

The goal is to include milk and milk products at the same quantities that your child would usually eat.

- Day 1 –Uncooked pasteurised cow’s milk - Start with 1 teaspoon added to foods and double up each day for at least 5 days.
- Challenge complete when tolerating 150ml cow’s milk for 5-day period.

The aim is to see if symptoms return once milk is included back into your child’s diet. You are often looking for the symptoms your child had that you felt might be a sign of CMPA. e.g., rash, vomiting, loose stools, blood in stools, unsettledness.

If the symptoms you are noticing are non-specific e.g., unsettledness, please continue with the introduction for a further 5 days to ensure the symptoms are happening more than once (reproducible). As we all know, children can be unsettled for so many reasons, so by continuing to include milk in your diet for a further few days, it ensures we are not restricting your diet unnecessarily.

If the symptoms return, STOP the reintroduction, return to your full milk exclusion diet and inform your doctor or dietitian. Your child’s symptoms should settle again within a few days and the diagnosis of cow’s milk allergy is now confirmed. If no symptoms occur, you can continue to drink cow’s milk and eat cow’s milk containing products, e.g. cheese and yogurt. Your child does not have cow’s milk allergy.

