

# INTRODUCING FOOD TO BABIES WHO MAY HAVE FOOD ALLERGIES



Written by: Mrs. Lilly Byrtus,  
AAIA Regional Coordinator, Prairies/NWT/Nunavut

---

From the moment we're born, we are exposed to many things in our environment - things that we eat and drink, things that we touch. The way that we react to these things is the story of allergy. If you react normally, there is no problem; if your body becomes sensitized to them, you become allergic. The difference lies in the individual's immune system.

Allergies tend to run in families. If anyone in the family has allergies to foods or medications, asthma, eczema, or hayfever, babies born into that family have a predisposition to allergies. They do not inherit the specific allergy, but merely the tendency to be allergic to something. (i.e., baby can be born with an allergy to peanut, although Mom or Dad has an allergy to pets).

Although the reason is not yet clear, viral infections often trigger the onset of allergies in a baby. Because of this, it is recommended to avoid situations where viruses are prevalent (i.e., daycares, play groups) until baby is at least three years old.

The third factor playing a significant role in development of allergies is exposure. The allergens that a baby at risk is exposed to during the first months of life are what that child is most likely to be allergic to for life.

In order to prevent allergies from developing in your newborn, there are certain steps that can be taken. These do not provide a guarantee against all allergies, however, if one child in the family has significant allergies, you may be willing to try these avoidance strategies:

1. Breast-feed for at least 3 months, preferably 6 months. Avoid the following foods while breast-feeding- milk, eggs, peanuts, nuts, fish and shellfish.  
(Take calcium supplements - 500 mg. once or twice a day)
2. Avoid cow's milk formula until after 12 months - preferable to use hydrolyzed formula first because the milk protein has been altered (eg. Nutramigen, Alimentum, or Goodstart) making it less allergenic.
3. Delay starting "solid" foods until after 6 months of age.
4. No eggs, eggs in baking, or egg products until 2 years.
5. No peanuts, nuts, fish or shellfish until 3 years old.
6. Preferably no fur or feather pets in baby's home (outside is OK).
7. No tobacco or wood smoke in baby's environment.
8. Avoid daycare centres until 3 years of age.

Babies are never allergic to breast milk, but they can and do react to foods which the mother eats, as they pass through the breast milk into the baby's digestive system. If you suspect that there are foods that you are eating that bother your baby, **KEEP BREAST FEEDING!** A baby who is sensitive to the tiny amounts of food components coming through your milk will probably be unable to tolerate most baby formulas.

Ideally a breast-feeding mother should eat a variety of foods to prevent sensitization to any one food. Eliminate a food if you think it bothers your baby. It may be necessary

to start a "food diary" to help you determine which food is the culprit. Generally, foods you eat will appear in your breast milk two to four hours after you eat. However, it seems that some babies react as soon as a few minutes after you eat certain foods, or as long as 72 hours after.

Typical symptoms to watch for that **may** indicate an allergy is present include:

- irritability
- frequent "colds"
- hives, welts
- nasal stuffiness
- rashes, eczema
- sneezing
- "colic"
- noisy breathing or wheezing
- diarrhea, constipation
- coughing
- vomiting

Often an allergic baby starts out with colic, goes on to develop eczema, then other symptoms develop as baby grows older and is exposed to new foods and environmental factors. Many allergic babies go on to develop asthma. (Three quarters of children with food allergies and eczema develop asthma & environmental allergies - sometimes referred to as the "allergic march".)

### Introducing Solids

- wait until baby is at least six months old -introduce only one new food at a time
- give one teaspoon on the first day; two teaspoons on the second day, etc. Keep adding one teaspoon each day for a week. If no symptoms occur, that food is considered "safe". If a reaction does occur, stop feeding that food.
- first foods to try (one at a time) - rice or barley cereal, carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, pears, applesauce, lamb.
- if your child refuses to eat a certain food, don't force them to eat it.
- if your child suffers a severe allergic reaction to a particular food (anaphylaxis) avoid that food completely, and carry a medication kit. Avoid eating out and when in doubt about the ingredients, don't allow your child to eat anything.
- avoid eggs and egg products until 2 years old.
- no peanuts, nuts, fish or shellfish until 3 years old.

### MOST COMMON FOOD ALLERGIES IN CHILDREN - MILK, EGGS & PEANUTS

*References: AAIA InfoLetter "Prevent Allergies, Begin at Birth"; Dr. Tkachyk's "Recommendations for Babies at Risk of Developing Allergy"; Dr. Ham Pong's "Peanut Allergy Handout"*

*This article courtesy of the Allergy/Asthma Information Association and the Calgary Allergy Network web site at <http://www.calgaryallergy.ca>. May be reproduced for educational, non-profit purposes.*

*The Allergy Asthma Information Association is a national, non-profit group devoted to helping those dealing with allergies and asthma. Become an AAIA member today!*

*National Office:*

*Allergy/Asthma Information Association*

*Box 100, Toronto, Ontario M9W 5K9 (effective Nov 1, 2000)*

*Phone (416) 679-9521 or toll-free 1-800-611-7011 Fax: (416) 679-9524*

*Web site: [www.aaia.ca](http://www.aaia.ca) Email: [national@aaia.ca](mailto:national@aaia.ca)*

*Mrs. Lilly Byrtus,*

*AAIA Regional Coordinator, Prairies/NWT/Nunavut*

*16531 - 114 Street, Edmonton, AB T5X 3V6*

*Phone/fax (780) 456-6651 Email: [prairies@aaia.ca](mailto:prairies@aaia.ca)*