

# Milk Allergy—Birth to 3 Years

## What is a milk allergy?

A milk allergy is when the body reacts to the protein in cow's milk. The only way to prevent a reaction is to avoid all foods that contain milk or milk proteins. A milk allergy is diagnosed by your healthcare team or doctor after some testing.

### Signs of a reaction to milk or milk ingredients include:

- skin problems like, eczema (dry, rough patches), hives (itchy bumps), and swelling of the face and lips
- stomach and gut problems like nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, reflux, stomach pain, and blood in stools
- airway problems like a runny nose, wheezing; trouble breathing, speaking, or swallowing; or drooling and gagging

These signs can happen a few minutes or a few hours after eating foods that contain milk or milk proteins.

**If you think an allergy is happening, stop giving the food.** Use [allergycheck.ca](http://allergycheck.ca) to see if the reaction is likely a food allergy. Get advice from Health Link (call 811) or your doctor.

**Call 911 or go to a hospital** if your baby has any of these severe reactions:

- trouble swallowing
- trouble breathing
- a limp body
- skin turning blue



## Lactose intolerance isn't the same as a milk allergy.

Lactose is the natural sugar found in milk.

**Lactose intolerance** is a problem digesting lactose. It happens when the body doesn't make enough of the enzyme lactase, which is needed to break down lactose. Lactose intolerance is rare in infants and uncommon in children.

Lactose intolerance is not life-threatening. Most people with lactose intolerance can still drink lactose-reduced milk and eat milk products low in lactose, such as aged cheese and yogurt.

## Feeding a baby or infant with a milk allergy

### Breastmilk

If you breastfeed, continue up to 2 years. Some babies with a milk allergy may react to traces of cow's milk protein in breast milk. If your baby shows signs of an allergic reaction:

- stop eating foods that contain milk or milk ingredients
- discuss with your healthcare provider if you should eat milk ingredients or not
- speak with a dietitian if you stop eating milk and milk ingredients

### Infant formula

Babies with a milk allergy who need a substitute for breastmilk are usually fed infant formula until 2 years. You may need to use one of these infant formulas:

- **extensively hydrolyzed** formula that has the proteins broken down into smaller pieces.
- **amino acid-based** formula that has even smaller pieces of proteins.
- **soy protein** formula. Babies with a milk allergy may also react to soy formula. Soy formula may be tried in babies over 6 months. Watch for signs of an allergic reaction.

Ask your child's doctor or dietitian what type of formula is best for your baby. You may need to ask a pharmacist to order it for you.

### Recommended type of formula:

## Soy and other plant-based beverages

### Under 2 years

- If recommended by your healthcare team, continue to use soy formula. Don't offer soy or other plant-based beverages (like almond, coconut, hemp, oat, pea, or rice) as the main drink unless your child's dietitian or doctor has recommended it.
- Plant-based beverages don't have the same energy, protein, and healthy fat as breastmilk, formula, or 3.25% (homogenized) milk to help your child grow and develop.

### 2 years and older

- You can continue breastmilk or switch from formula to fortified plant-based beverages. See [ahs.ca/nutrition](https://www.ahs.ca/nutrition) and search for plant-based beverages.

## What about milk from other animals?

A child who is allergic to cow's milk is often allergic to milk from other animals, such as goat, sheep, or buffalo, as the proteins are very similar. **Talk to your child's doctor or dietitian before giving other animal milks to your child.**

## Starting solid foods

### Around 6 months (4–6 months corrected age)

- Babies need solid foods in addition to breastmilk or formula.
- **Don't give your baby foods and drinks that contain milk or milk ingredients.**
- Many baby cereals have milk as an ingredient. Read the ingredient list to find one without milk or milk ingredients.
- Feeding common food allergens may help prevent allergies to these foods. Offer one at a time around 6 months.

These common food allergens are:

eggs	fish and shellfish
peanuts	tree nuts
sesame	wheat
soy	

- **Talk to your child's doctor to see if you can give baked foods containing milk to your child.**

## Avoid foods that contain milk or milk ingredients

- **Butter**  
butter fat, butter flavouring, butter oil, butter solids, buttermilk, and ghee
- **Cheese**  
all cheeses, including cheese curds, cottage cheese, cream cheese, dairy cheese, feta cheese, processed cheese, quark, and ricotta cheese
- **Cream**  
cereal cream, dried cream, half and half cream, ice cream, light cream, sour cream, and whipping cream
- **Custards and puddings** made with milk
- **Margarine** may have milk ingredients. Choose a vegan option.
- **Milk**  
acidophilus milk, buttermilk, condensed milk, evaporated milk, ice milk, kefir, kumiss, lactose-free milk, lactose-reduced milk, powdered milk, and skim, 1%, 2%, and 3.25% milk.
- **Tuna**  
(canned) some may be made with milk protein as a filler
- **Yogurt and frozen yogurt** made with milk

## Read the label

Read the list of ingredients on the food label **every time** you buy a product because the ingredients may change.

**In Canada, products that contain any milk or milk ingredient must be labelled with the word "milk".**

Avoid food that has the words "milk", "contains milk", or "may contain milk" on the label.

**Ingredients:** Rice flour, dry skim milk, dicalcium phosphate, safflower oil, soy lecithin, iron, natural flavour.

**Contains:** milk

## Avoid these foods and ingredients (contain milk)

- Buttermilk solids, dry milk or sour milk solids
- Casein: hydrolyzed casein, rennet casein
- Caseinates: ammonium caseinate, calcium caseinate, caseinate hydrolysate, magnesium caseinate, potassium caseinate, and sodium caseinate
- Delactosed whey, demineralized whey
- Hydrolyzed milk protein, hydrolyzed whey
- Lactalbumin, lactalbumin phosphate,
- Lactoferrin, lactoglobulin, beta-lactoglobulin
- Milk derivative, milk fat, milk ingredients, milk protein, and modified milk ingredients
- Opta® or Simplese® (fat replacers)
- Sweet dairy whey, whey hydrolysate, whey powder, whey protein concentrate, and whey protein isolate

If you're not sure if a food has milk or milk ingredients in it, avoid it. Ask the food manufacturer or a healthcare provider for more information.



## Other possible sources of milk

- The **wax coating on some fresh fruit and vegetables** may contain casein (milk). Wash fresh vegetables and fruit well before using.
- Some **medicines** contain milk ingredients. Talk to your pharmacist for more information.

## Some safe ingredients and foods (do not contain milk):

- Calcium stearoyl lactylate
- Cocoa butter
- Cream of tartar
- Oleoresin
- Sodium lactate
- Sodium stearoyl lactylate

**The ingredients below are used to fortify (increase the calcium) in foods and do not contain milk.**

- Calcium lactate
- Calcium carbonate
- Calcium citrate
- Calcium gluconate
- Calcium phosphate
- Calcium sulphate

You will see these listed in the ingredient list if they have been added to foods.

The lists on this page are only a guide and may change. Always read the label.

Food products from other countries do not follow the same labelling standards as Canada.



## Living with Food Allergy

Life changes when a child is diagnosed with a food allergy. You and people around your child will need to be careful shopping, making food and feeding your child.

It can be hard and stressful at first. You may find living with allergy gets less stressful over time.

For kitchen tips, recipes and resources, visit [foodallergycanada.ca](http://foodallergycanada.ca) and search [living with food allergy](#).

## Calcium and vitamin D

Calcium and vitamin D help build strong, healthy bones and support health. It may be hard to get enough if avoiding foods that contain milk. When your baby starts to eat, offer food in a texture (pureed, blended) that matches your baby's ability.

### Amount of Calcium and Vitamin D needed daily

Age	Calcium	Vitamin D
0–6 months	200 mg	400 IU
7–12 months	260 mg	400 IU
1–3 years	700 mg	600 IU

### Amount of Calcium in Foods

Food Sources	Calcium
almond butter, chia seeds	2 Tbsp (30 mL) 100 mg
almonds or Brazil nuts	¼ cup (60 mL) 100 mg
blackstrap molasses	1 Tbsp (15 mL) 200 mg
bok choy, kale, or collard greens, cooked	½ cup (125 mL) 100 mg
fortified plant-based beverages	1 cup (250 mL) 300 mg
fortified plant-based cheese	30 g 35–125 mg
fortified plant-based yogurts	¾ cup (175 mL) 70–225 mg
infant formula	1 cup (250 mL) 118 mg
salmon or sardines, canned	2 ½ oz (75 g) 45–200 mg
sesame or poppy seeds	1 Tbsp (15 mL) 100 mg
soup made with fortified plant beverage	1 cup (250 mL) 200 mg
tofu made with calcium	¾ cup (150 g) 75–100 mg
navy, soy or white beans, cooked	¾ cup (175 mL) 100 mg

## Vitamin D

All babies and children in Alberta need a 400 IU vitamin D supplement every day. Offer these foods along with the supplement when introducing foods.

### Amount of Vitamin D in Foods

Food Sources:	Vitamin D
eggs	2 large 70
fatty fish	2.5 oz (75 g) 100–400
fortified plant-based beverages (2 and up)	1 cup (250 mL) 100–200
fortified plant-based yogurts	¾ cup (175 mL) 40–50
infant formula	1 cup (250 mL) 100
margarine	2 tsp (10 g) 50–100

## Can a child outgrow a milk allergy?

Most children outgrow a milk allergy by the time they're 1–3 years old. Talk with your child's doctor before adding foods that contain milk or milk ingredients back into your child's diet. The doctor can tell you when and how to safely offer milk to your child.

## For more information



- **Talk to your healthcare team.**
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://www.ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts).
- Visit [canada.ca/en/services/health](https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health) and select [food and nutrition](#)>[food safety](#)>[food allergies and intolerances](#).

