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Infants and Allergies

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Late last year, the results of an extensive Italian study involving diet, environment and infant allergies came across my desk. The study compared more than 300 high-risk infants with multiple types of intervention.

The focus of the intervention was in three areas:

- mother's diet;
- infant's diet;
- environmental factors.

The mothers in the intervention group's dietary modifications included:

1. No more than six ounces of milk per day were given to nursing mothers.
2. No eggs were allowed in the diet of nursing mothers.

The infants in the intervention group's dietary modifications included:

1. No solid foods were introduced until the 5th month of life.
2. Solid foods were introduced at a rate of no more than one new food every 7-10 days.
3. Only low-allergy solid foods were given from the 5th through 12th months.

4. The solid foods that were considered low allergy included: cereal from rice, corn or tapioca; vegetables excluding all beans and tomatoes; olive oil; no dairy products except for Parmesan cheese; no eggs; turkey, lamb and rabbit were allowed, but no beef, pork, chicken or fish.

5. From the 12th month to the 24th month, all foods were introduced except eggs, nuts and cocoa, which were not given until after two years of age.

The environmental controls for the intervention group included:

- no smoking in the child's house;
- no cats, dogs or other pets with fur;
- weekly carpet cleaning;
- isolation from nurseries and preschool until two years of age.

The authors concluded that many of the preventive measures in the study were effective in reducing allergic symptoms in high-risk infants. At the end of the three year follow-up, when the intervention group was compared to the nonintervention group, the authors determined the top six factors that caused infant allergies. They were:

1. introduction of formula during the first week of life;
2. weaning before four months of age;
3. feeding beef at less than six months of age;
4. feeding cow's milk at less than six months of age;
5. second-hand tobacco smoke exposure;
6. entering day care before two years of age.

Although this was just one study, the intervention was extensive. The results are pleasing in that many common causes of infant allergies are easy to control.

Reference

1. Marini et al. Effects of a dietary and environmental prevention program on the incidence of allergic symptoms in high atopic risk infants: three years follow-up. *Acta Paediatrica* 1996;85:414(1-21).

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