Adelaide Mums & Babies Clinic

NON-IGE MEDIATED COW'S MILK PROTEIN INTOLERANCE (CMPI)

WHAT IS NON-IGE MEDIATED CMPI?

Non-IgE mediated Cow's Milk Protein Intolerance (CMPI) is a delayed immune reaction to cow's milk proteins that mostly affects the digestive system. Unlike a true food allergy, there is no risk of anaphylaxis, and symptoms often appear hours to days after consuming cow's milk (unlikely an IgE mediated allergy which occurs within minutes).

It's one of the most common food-related problems in babies under 12 months.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

Most symptoms relate to the gut, but others may also occur. They usually develop slowly over time, although most babies will show signs between 2-6 weeks of age:

- Frequent vomiting, often to the point of losing weight or feed refusal
- Loose, mucusy, green or bloody stools
- Constipation or straining
- Poor weight gain or feeding refusal
- Eczema (may worsen with dairy exposure – but important to discuss with your GP first)

General:

- Persistent irritability
- Trouble settling or sleeping despite regular feeds and cuddles

WHAT'S GOING ON?

In non-IgE CMPI, the immune system in the gut reacts to cow's milk proteins (like casein and whey), causing inflammation. This leads to discomfort, digestive issues, and poor absorption of nutrients. It is not an allergy involving antibodies (IgE), so allergy tests (like skin pricks or blood tests) are usually negative.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

There is no single test to confirm non-IgE CMPI. Diagnosis is usually based on:

1. Medical history and symptoms
2. Elimination of cow's milk protein from the baby's diet (and mother's diet if breastfeeding)
3. Symptom improvement
4. Reintroduction challenge after a few weeks, under medical guidance (if parents are game!)

HOW IS IT MANAGED?

If Your Baby is Formula-Fed:

- Switch to a hypoallergenic formula, such as:
  - Rice based formula such as Novolac Allergy
  - Extensively hydrolysed formula (EHF): e.g. , Aptamil Allerpro, Pepti-Junior, Alfare
  - If symptoms don't improve, your doctor may recommend an amino acid-based formula: e.g. Neocate, EleCare

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Some formulas are available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) with a prescription from your GP or paediatrician (GP will need to discuss with a paediatric allergist or similar). Over the counter options include Aptamil Allepro and Novolac Allergy. Goat formulas can often cross-react and are not recommended.

If You're Breastfeeding:

- Mum may need to follow a dairy-free diet, avoiding:
  - Milk, cheese, yoghurt, butter
  - Hidden sources (check food labels)

Work with a dietitian to maintain a balanced diet and ensure enough calcium and vitamin D. This usually involves supplementing with calcium (check for hidden soy if excluding this)

Introducing Solids

- Stick to dairy-free foods until advised otherwise.
- Watch for any return of symptoms.
- Consult a health professional before trialling dairy again.

WILL MY BABY OUTGROW IT?

Yes — most babies outgrow non-IgE CMPI by 1 to 3 years of age. 50% may outgrow by 6 months and 90% by 9 months. Your doctor may recommend a milk challenge every 3-6 months to check for tolerance.

Some families elect to use a "milk ladder" such as this (click here) to gradually introduce dairy to see how much their baby tolerates. This can generally occur about 6-8 months of age, however we suggest to discuss this with your doctor first.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR FAMILIES

Label Reading Tips

- Avoid foods with: milk solids, casein, whey, lactose, butterfat
- Look for "may contain traces of milk" if your baby is very sensitive

Safe Dairy-Free Foods

- Fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes
- Meats, poultry, fish
- Dairy-free products (e.g. plant-based spreads, fortified oat or rice milk for older children) https://www.peta.org.au/living/accidentally-vegan/ is a great resource!

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Shopping & Cooking

- Many Australian supermarkets have "free from" sections
- Some online apps allow you to filter allergens when placing a grocery order
- Use dairy-free recipes or substitutes (e.g. coconut yoghurt, dairy-free margarine)
- Talk to childcare or carers about your baby's dietary needs

SUPPORT & RESOURCES

- GP or Paediatrician – for diagnosis and formula prescriptions
- Accredited Dietitian – to support feeding and nutrition and breastfeeding mothers
- Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia
- ASCIA
- Nip Allergies in the Bub

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

- If your baby has ongoing symptoms despite dietary changes
- Poor growth or feeding issues
- Severe constipation, blood in stools, or ongoing vomiting
- Concerns about your diet or baby's nutrition

Having a baby with CMPI can feel overwhelming — but you're not alone. With the right support, most children outgrow it completely, and many families go on to have happy, healthy eaters. There are a number of social media groups for peer support and food options.