**Milk Ladder – Frequently asked Questions**

**What is the Milk Ladder?**

The Milk Ladder is a plan for the introduction of milk and dairy products into the diet of children with cow’s milk allergy. It starts with foods that contain only a small amount of well-cooked milk protein and progresses towards un-cooked dairy products and fresh milk. It is called the ‘Milk Ladder’ because completing each of the steps in the plan is like climbing a rung on a ladder towards being able to fully tolerate milk and dairy products.

**Why do I need to follow a Milk Ladder?**

Most children will grow out of their milk allergy. Some studies suggest that giving your child small amounts of milk protein, if they can tolerate it, may speed up the process of growing out of their allergy. By introducing milk protein in a stepwise way, you will be able to find out your child’s level of tolerance.

**I am breastfeeding and excluding cow’s milk from my diet. Do I start the Milk Ladder with my own diet, or my child’s?**

It is better to reintroduce cow’s milk protein into your child’s diet through their food rather than via breast milk. The transfer of cow’s milk protein through breast milk is variable and the delay before symptoms appear can make it hard to interpret what is going on. Once your child is progressing on the Milk Ladder, you can start it yourself following a step behind.

**When do I start the Milk Ladder?**

Don’t start the Milk Ladder when you are very busy or have an important appointment to go to. It is better to start in the morning or lunchtime, rather than in the evening, so you can monitor tolerance during the day. It is not advised to start the milk ladder if your child is unwell, actively teething or has had an immunisation in the last few days.

**How long do I spend on each step?**

Each step will normally take 4 – 7 days. However, you can take it more slowly if you prefer. DO NOT increase food portions or introduce new foods when your child is unwell.

**How will I know if my child has reacted to foods on the Milk Ladder?**

The symptoms of an allergic reaction can include reflux or vomiting, tummy pain or bloating, diarrhoea or constipation, eczema or other skin rashes, wheezing, swelling of the lips or face or irritation to the eyes or nose. Please note that your child may not react to milk in the same way that they did when they were first diagnosed with a cow’s milk allergy.

**What should I do if my child reacts to foods on any step of the Milk Ladder?**

If you are clear that your child is having symptoms, stop giving the foods on that step to your child. You should continue to give your child the foods on any previous steps of the Milk Ladder that they have successfully introduced into their diet. Offer these foods at least 2 – 3 times per week as this will help to maintain their tolerance.

You can try the next step up again 2 – 3 months’ time.

**I am not sure if my child is having a reaction. What do I do?**

When you start the Milk Ladder or progress to a higher step, it is natural to be watching your child very carefully. Therefore, you may pick up on small changes that are quite mild e.g., a slight change in bowel habit, a little more wind. Do not assume that all changes are due to the introduction of new foods.

If you are unsure, wait a day or two and then re-try the same food. If it is a reaction to the milk protein, then the same reaction will happen again. If symptoms are very mild, you may want to gently continue with the Milk Ladder as often these symptoms settle down after a few days.

**I have been advised to stop my child’s prescribed milk. What do I do?**

It is best to stay at your current step on the Milk Ladder for a week or two whilst you introduce the new milk. As it may take some months or even years to get to the top step of the ladder (full fat cow’s milk), we do not recommend that you stay on prescribed milk longer than you have been advised.

**My child is frequently unwell and progress has been slow. What can I do?**

It is not unusual for progress up the Milk Ladder to be delayed. Illness, teething, immunisations, changes of circumstance and separation anxiety may all interrupt progress. Continue to give your child the foods on any previous steps of the Milk Ladder that they have successfully introduced into their diet. When they are well again or circumstances have improved, you can continue to try the next step.

**What about school or nursery?**

It is best for parents to oversee the Milk Ladder. Nurseries and schools are not expected to be able to decide whether a milk product is safe to give to your child. We suggest that the food offered to your child at nursery or school continues to be cow’s milk free whilst you work on the Milk Ladder at home.

**My child has multiple food allergies and I want to start another ladder. What do I do?**

Some children will have allergies to other foods such as egg or soya as well as to cow’s milk protein. You can manage two or three ladders alongside each other, but you should only make changes to one at a time. For example, if your child is tolerating step 2 of the milk ladder, you could ‘park’ it there. Whilst you continue to give your child the foods at step 2, you can work on a step of a different ladder. Do not introduce or increase two food allergens at the same time.

**I cannot make the foods on the milk ladder. What can I do?**

There are recipes for the foods on steps 1 – 3 and egg and wheat-free alternatives for those who need them. However, you may not have the facilities or time to bake so you can use some shop-bought alternatives.

**Step 1 Alternatives**

A malted milk biscuit or another plain biscuit containing milk powder not whey powder.

**Step 2 Alternatives**

A plain muffin, plain brioche, milk loaf, scone, croissant. You could also give quick cook frozen ready-made Yorkshire pudding or recipes containing butter e.g., pastry, roast potatoes.

**Step 3 Alternatives**

A shop-bought plain pancake or crepe or scotch pancake or a dish cooked in the oven for at least 30 minutes e.g., Shepherd’s Pie or fish pie made with milk/cheese, lasagne, pizza.

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