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Milk Protein Colitis

What is milk protein colitis?

Milk protein colitis is an inflammation of the gastrointestinal system from certain food proteins, most commonly the proteins found in cow's milk. Infants are exposed to these proteins through mother's breast milk and/or formula. This inflammation is a common cause of blood in the stool in an otherwise healthy infant. It usually occurs within the first weeks to months of life, and almost always resolves on its own, usually by a year of age. This condition is common, occurring in about 1-2% of infants.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms can vary but typically include stools that are visibly streaked with blood or large amounts of mucus. While some infants are fussy and irritable, the majority of infants with this condition are generally healthy appearing and happy, thus many infants have symptoms for weeks or months before they are formally diagnosed.

How is it treated?

The treatment for this condition is complete elimination of cow's milk from the diet. For breastfed infants, this is done by eliminating all milk protein from the mother's diet. For formula-fed infants, formula like Nutramigen or Alimentum which have proteins that are broken down can be used. With complete elimination of the cow's milk protein from the mother's diet or use of these formulas, bleeding typically clears within two weeks, but can take up to 6 weeks to resolve completely.

Sometimes the bleeding can reoccur. Most of the time, this happens because of unintentional intake of a milk-based product, like at a restaurant. If the bleeding is minor, does not last and does not happen frequently, no further action needs to be taken other than to continue to avoid milk products. Sometimes, if symptoms persist, your provider may recommend that soy also be removed from mother's diet.

The prognosis for infants with this condition is excellent! Nearly all infants will be able to tolerate cow's milk by one year of age. Progression to more serious gastrointestinal illness is extremely rare. This condition is not a food allergy, and is not related to children who get hives or anaphylaxis with milk.

When to call?

Please call the office if your baby is having persistent bloody stools, poor feeding, vomiting, is inconsolable or has fever.

Please contact the office with any questions or concerns.

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