

NUTRITION & IMMUNITY PODCAST SERIES

IMMUNITY & HMO :: ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS ON INFANT FEEDING

Featuring :: Karyn Wulf, MD, MPH and Courtney Krizek

TRANSCRIPT

Maura: Let's say you're not feeling your best. You have a headache. You're unusually tired. Maybe you're running a fever or you can't stop coughing. Meanwhile, your infant is sleeping peacefully in the other room, and any minute, it will be time for that 2 AM feeding. So, what should you do?

Maura: Especially in today's global health environment, many new parents have questions about how best to feed their babies without exposing them to illness—whether that illness is as simple as the common cold, or maybe something riskier, like Covid-19.

Maura: I'm Maura Bowen, podcasting today for Abbott Nutrition Health Institute. I'm here today with Dr Karyn Wulf (MD, MPH), who is not just the Pediatric Medical Director at Abbott Nutrition, but also a practicing pediatrician and mother of four. What I'm saying is, she's an expert on this subject.

Maura: Also joining us today is Courtney Krizek, a manager here at Abbott and also a mother of a newborn, so she knows her stuff, too.

Maura: One thing to note before we get started: This podcast recording may sound softer than you're used to hearing. That's for the sake of social distancing. Dr Wulf, Courtney and I are all dialing in for today's discussion rather than sitting in the studio.

Maura: So, Dr Wulf, Courtney, welcome!

Dr Wulf: Thank you for having us!

Courtney: Yes, thank you

Maura: Thank you so much for being here. I think we're going to switch up our interview format a bit today. My boys are both teenagers, so I'm more than a decade removed from the questions at hand. Which makes me think it makes more sense to step aside and leave this conversation to you two experts. So: Are you ready to get started?

Dr Wulf: Certainly am.

Courtney: Yes, ready to go!

Maura: Great. Courtney, when you think about the scenario I talked about in the beginning of this recording, what would you want to ask Dr Wulf if you were in the situation I described.

Courtney: My first question is about feeding my baby when she has a cold, when she's congested and not feeling very great, it seems like she may be taking a little less volume at her feedings. How can I make sure she's drinking enough?

Dr Wulf: Generally, we can tell if an infant is taking enough fluids in by the number of wet diapers produced in the short term. Over a longer time, we also look at infant's growth curve. When infants have a cold, sometimes nasal congestion can make breast and bottle feeding a little more challenging as infants prefer to breathe thru their noses. You can try using something like nasal drops and a bulb syringe you often get sent home from the hospital with. You can use that bulb syringe to gently clear their noses prior to feeding, and that can help decrease the nasal congestion.

Dr Wulf: During these times, their appetite may not be normal, and that really is ok. They may want to take a smaller amount of their feeding and may want it a little more frequently, and that's ok also.

Courtney: Ok, that's really helpful. On another topic related to my baby being sick and feeding: I'm never quite sure how concerned I should be about vomiting. How do I know if it's just a fluke or something more serious? What do I do if my baby vomits right after being fed?

Dr Wulf: This can happen sometimes, and it's hard to know why infants do this. Infants can vomit for many reasons, and if it happens more than once or twice, it's important to talk to your baby's doctor about why they're vomiting. But in the short term, there are things you can do if your infant is vomiting at home. First of all, it's important for the tummy to try to rest. You want to go ahead and give them small amounts of fluid—generally about a teaspoonful or 5 ml at a time—something that's easy for your baby to handle, like human milk or an oral rehydration solution. You give them that small amount every few minutes to try to keep them hydrated. It is important to talk to baby's doctor if they continue vomiting or they're not making wet diapers.

Courtney: Ok, thank you for clarifying that for me. That helps me to navigate the situation. With the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, I find myself thinking through scenarios if I were to become sick, and how that would impact what I can and can't do with my baby. Admittedly, I did this a lot this winter during flu season as well. Dr Wulf, when I am sick, can I still breastfeed my baby?

Dr Wulf: In general, if you're feeling up to breastfeeding, you should. When mom gets sick, her own body begins to produce antibodies to try to fight the infection she's been exposed to or she has. And some of these antibodies can be passed to the baby through the human milk. So if mom is able to stay hydrated enough, and is feeling up to nursing, she should and can continue breastfeeding safely.

Dr Wulf: There are certain illnesses like HIV, where breastfeeding should be discontinued because the infection can actually be passed from mom to the baby through the breastmilk. But for common illnesses, like upper respiratory tract infections, gastroenteritis, influenza, feeding is still safe.

Dr Wulf: With Covid-19 being a new illness, less is known about this. And as of April 2020, what we do know is that if a nursing mom has Covid-19, this new virus has not been detected in breastmilk, so breastfeeding is still safe.

Courtney: Are there any additional precautions I should take if I suspect I'm sick or know that I'm sick? And, do I need to wear a mask while I'm breastfeeding?

Dr Wulf: For direct nursing with Covid-19, it is recommended that mom cover her nose and mouth with a mask during breastfeeding. For other respiratory illnesses and infectious illnesses like stomach bugs, carefully washing mom's hands every time she's caring for her infant and trying to avoid coughing or sneezing directly on her infant is important. But routine mask wearing is only important right now for Covid-19.

Courtney: Ok, thank you so much for clarifying that. Personally, in addition to breastfeeding, I also pump, and we've begun to supplement with formula once a day. Are there any special tips or precautions related to pumping, or when I'm making a bottle either of my expressed breastmilk or formula when I'm sick?

Dr Wulf: Good handwashing is really the key in any sort of food handling, and that includes human milk and formula. So, whoever is prepping the bottle needs to make sure they wash their hands 20- to 30 seconds with warm water and soap. And, if mom's pumping, she needs to make sure she's washing her hands before and after pumping as well.

Courtney: Now, if I become so sick that I have to be temporarily separated from my infant, will I still be able to provide breast milk and will it still be ok to do so at that point?

Dr Wulf: Well, Courtney, I'm sad that these are things you have to deal with and think about at this time. That makes me hurt for you. If that is the case, that you became so sick that you'd have to temporarily separated, and you're still feeling well enough to pump, yes, you can still provide your infant with your pumped breast milk. If you are so ill that you become temporarily unable to pump due to illness, you can safely use formula for a few feedings without worrying.

Dr Wulf: If you do need to be separated from your infant—hopefully not—but had to be hospitalized for some reason, there are ways to support lactation even during those times. Under those special circumstances, I would recommend you consult with a lactation consultant, either in the hospital, or with someone you've worked with in the past to talk about ways to help bridge breastfeeding during those stressful times.

Courtney: Dr Wulf, what are some of the components of breast milk that help to contribute to immunity for my baby?

Dr Wulf: That's such an important question. Human milk is so fascinating. Not only is it complete nutrition, but it's nutrition that can change with mom and baby. And, not only does it have complete nutrition, but it has other factors in it as well, and some of these factors can directly support the immune system of infants.

Dr Wulf: We mentioned earlier that human milk contains something called antibodies. These are also known as immunoglobulins. And then can be made in mom's immune system when mom is exposed to an illness. These immunoglobulins can be passed from mom to baby in her milk. And this is one of the reasons that breastfeeding even when mom is sick can help be protective to the infant. Breast milk contains other substances as well that help support immunity; and one of the things breast milk contains a large amount of is human milk oligosaccharides, or HMOs, and these can also support an infant's immunity.

Courtney: Ok. Can you tell us a little bit more about HMOs and how they're helping my baby's immunity?

Dr Wulf: So, human milk oligosaccharides are a type of non-digested carbohydrate that are found in human milk. There are over two hundred different human milk oligosaccharides that have been identified, and they make up the third most abundant solid component of human milk. It's really interesting, because these carbohydrates are not broken down, they're not absorbed by the human intestines, rather they act as a food for the beneficial or good bacteria in your infant's intestines. So, in addition to feeding these beneficial bacteria, this is called a prebiotic, human milk oligosaccharides can also pass through to the infant's bloodstream and help to decrease inflammation and inflammatory markers that circulate in your baby's body, and this can also help support immune function.

Maura: Great. Thank you both for your great questions and answers. We really appreciate your willingness to help build awareness for the important role nutrition has to play in keeping infants healthy when illnesses are quite literally in the air. I hope you'll join us on the ANHI podcast again very soon!

Maura: And for our listeners: If you're hoping for more podcast episodes on nutrition and immunity, rest assured we're developing a series of additional episodes to help support you. You can find these recordings on anhi.org by clicking "RESOURCES" then "PODCASTS & VIDEOS" at the top of the page. Don't miss an episode: Become an anhi.org member today by clicking "REGISTER" at the top of our homepage to receive regular nutrition science news updates from our team. Or, follow the Abbott Nutrition Health Institute on LinkedIn.

Maura: Finally, our website, anhi.org, has a series of printable resources related to this topic—for instance, infographics on [nutrition and immunity](#), [dehydration](#), and [why maintaining muscle matters](#). You can find these resources on anhi.org by clicking "RESOURCES" and "PRINTABLE MATERIALS."

Maura: Thanks everyone. Stay healthy and safe.