Allergy Prevention by Fatty Acids in Breast Milk and Dairy Products

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Over 30 years of research on the role of breastfeeding in allergy and asthma prevention has produced inconsistent results. Inconsistencies may be due to differences in breastmilk composition, which depends on maternal diet, notably the intake of n-3 and n-6 long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids (LCPUFAs).

At least three studies have demonstrated a protective effect of omega-3 LCPUFAs in breast milk against the development of eczema and airway allergy. Additionally, experiments in mice suggested that also ruminant fatty acids protect against allergic manifestations. In the KOALA Birth Cohort Study the latter has been confirmed in human infants (Thijs et al, Allergy 2011). Ruminant fatty acids in dairy products may therefore explain the findings in many studies of protection against allergy and asthma development by the use of whole vs skimmed milk and butter vs margarine.

For further information: www.koala-study.nl/researchers.html