

Breast milk sugar promotes colitis in offspring

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A sugar found in mouse breast milk promotes the generation of colitis in offspring, according to a study published online on November 22 in the *Journal of Experimental Medicine*.

Sugars in breast milk are essential for the development of the newborn [immune system](#) and the growth of beneficial commensal bacteria in the gut. But certain milk sugars in certain contexts could be bad news. A group led by Thierry Hennet at the University of Zurich found that newborn mice fostered by mothers lacking one particular milk sugar—sialyl(alpha2,3)lactose—were less susceptible to inflammation-induced colitis later in life. The resistance to [colitis](#) was attributed to differences in the commensal bacteria.

Determining whether this milk sugar has some redeeming qualities—for example in facilitating defense against dangerous intestinal pathogens—will require further studies.

More information: Fuhrer, A., et al. 2010. J. Exp. Med. [doi:10.1084/jem.20101098](https://doi.org/10.1084/jem.20101098)

Provided by Rockefeller University

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