

Heidi Wright's Story

Heidi Wright knows breast feeding might not protect her four-month-old daughter Gracie from developing type 1 diabetes. She breast fed her first child, Matthew, until he was xx months old, and two months later he was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Still, Wright opted to participate with Gracie in a clinical trial designed to determine whether babies who are fed cow's milk during the first six months of life are more at risk for developing type 1 diabetes than babies who are breast fed. "The TRIGR study isn't like an intervention experiment. The study encourages breast feeding, but the choice is yours. If you chose to breast feed, you-really, your baby-become one of many who are monitored for several years. If you chose not to breast feed, or if something happens that makes it not possible to breast feed, the study provides you with an ample supply of formula and you're monitored exactly the same way" explains Wright. "This is where it does get a little experimental because TRIGR supplies you with one of two formulas and you don't know which one you've got. Both are commercially available-products you'd probably purchase without thinking about it. But one contains whole cow's milk protein and the other contains a form of cow's milk protein that's been synthetically broken down." Wright admits she knows now one formula might possibly provide a degree of "lesser risk" than the other. But, she also acknowledges that if she hadn't enrolled in the TRIGR study, she wouldn't know there was a difference and would be just as likely to buy either one. Wright's choice is to breast feed Gracie, and she's hoping nothing will interfere.

"I have formula supplied by the TRIGR study on hand," she says. "I don't know which formula it is, but if something happens and I can't breast feed Gracie, we'll use the formula supplied by TRIGR." There is no history of type 1 diabetes in the Wright family on either side. Matthew's diagnosis came as a shock. "He came down with a virus and he ran a high temperature for a couple of days and he also had a really bad rash. Our pediatrician diagnosed it as a virus, and I'm sure it was," Wright says. "But he didn't seem to ever really recover. He seemed 'wiped out' for a couple of weeks after that. Matthew was sleeping in our bed then, and I remember thinking he smelled like pancake syrup." Wright has a background in veterinary medicine and she and her husband are close friends with a family whose son had recently been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. "We were with our friends on a Sunday night and the more we talked about it, the more I began to wonder about Matthew. Their son's experience was quite different than what we were dealing with, but it did begin to click. By Tuesday morning, Matthew was having trouble breathing. We got him to the hospital and he was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes." Whether the virus "triggered" type 1 diabetes in Matthew is anyone's guess, according to Wright. "I think the course was set and the virus did him in," she says. "I can't protect Gracie from every virus that comes down the pike. She's going to be around other kids and other kids might be sick. I can't protect her from everything and there's so many things that might be involved in triggering diabetes. It would be impossible to live that way." Wright says that participating in the TRIGR study is something she can and is doing easily to help research. "We've learned so much just from being involved. We'll know if Gracie develops autoimmune markers for diabetes and, if she does, we know that the best people will be monitoring her to see if the disease is eminent." Statistically, it's unlikely Gracie will ever develop type 1 diabetes. "If she does, we'll have to manage with that in our lives, just like we do with

Matthew," says Wright. "Of course we're hoping it never happens. And when it doesn't, we'll be very happy to have been a part of a research effort that's trying to determine why type 1 diabetes does and doesn't happen in children who are genetically susceptible to the disease."