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NEWS

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*****UT Southwestern researcher studies
breastfeeding and other factors that
seem to help newborn infants resist
infection.

DALLAS--Factors that help newborn infants resist bacteria are the focus of a study by Dr. George H. McCracken, Jr., professor of pediatrics at The University of Texas Health Science Center. He has received a renewed March of Dimes birth defects research grant of \$18,000 for the current year.

Most bacterial infections in newborn infants can be traced to two types of bacteria, called E. coli K1 and group B streptococci. These bacteria are present in nearly all adults, and most infants acquire them from their mothers at or soon after birth. Dr. McCracken hopes to find out why they are harmless in most cases, but sometimes spread from the intestines to the bloodstream and spinal fluid, where they can kill or cripple by causing meningitis.

There have been indications for some time that breast-fed babies are less frequently infected than bottle-fed babies. Dr. McCracken believes that breast-fed babies are protected by antibodies and other anti-bacterial agents in breast milk or colostrum, the fluid that accompanies milk, and that possibly harmless bacteria from breast milk flourish in babies' intestines and crowd out the dangerous types.

He will also investigate the influence of antibiotics given directly to the infant or transferred in the milk of a mother who is being treated with drugs, to learn how they interact with natural immune protection and whether they alter the normal balance of bacteria in an infant's intestines. Answers to these questions may lead to more effective control of infections that can take a baby's life almost as soon as it begins.

The March of Dimes currently supports birth defects research, medical services and education with grants totaling more than \$644,000 in the state of Texas.

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