

5 things you should know about Food Allergies

Are you or your children at risk of developing food allergy?

1. WHAT IS ALLERGY?

An allergy occurs when the body's immune system overreacts to a normally harmless substance. Substances that can trigger an allergic reaction are called allergens. Allergens that trigger an allergic reaction may be in medication, the environment, like pollens, grasses, moulds, dogs and cats, or sometimes, in the food we eat. Individuals can have mild allergies or severe allergies. Up to 40% of Australian children are affected by allergies of some sort during their life time.

The most common allergic conditions in children are food allergies, eczema, asthma and hay fever.

2. WHO IS AT RISK OF DEVELOPING ALLERGY?

If you have a family history of allergic conditions, it makes sense to try to reduce the risk of your children developing allergic diseases. If you or your partner has an allergy, your child has a 30% chance of inheriting the allergic gene and therefore could develop eczema, asthma, hay fever or a food allergy. If both parents have a history of some allergic condition, your child has a 40% to 60% chance of having a child with some form of allergy.

If you have a history of allergy in the family you are encouraged NOT to SMOKE during pregnancy and TO BREAST FEED your baby for at least 6 months.

(see ASCIA Allergy Prevention in Children www.allergy.org.au)

3. WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGIC REACTION ?

An allergic reaction to food is your child's immune system responding to a normally harmless protein in a particular food. Most allergic reactions are mild and cause minor symptoms, such as a few hives or minor swelling. Severe eczema in very young babies is sometimes a sign of a food allergy and should be investigated by a doctor experienced in food allergy if it is not responding to routine treatment advised by your doctor.

The most serious symptoms of a food allergy are breathing difficulties and/or a sudden drop in blood pressure (a pale and floppy infant), which can be life-threatening. This type of severe reaction is known as anaphylaxis. It is important that those with serious allergies have their trigger correctly identified to make it easier to avoid the allergen/trigger, carry emergency medication with them always, and know when and how to use it.

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www.allergyfacts.org.au



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A charity committed to helping keep those with severe allergy safe



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Food allergy symptoms usually occur soon after eating the food or within two hours of eating. Sometimes sensitivity to a food allergen can happen through food proteins in breast milk or in some babies with itchy skin, as a result of creams containing food allergens such as nut oils, milk or egg for example.

4. WHAT IS FOOD INTOLERANCE ?

Many people think their child is allergic to a food when in fact they are intolerant to a food. Food intolerance symptoms include headaches after eating too much chocolate, bloating after a milkshake or pasta, or skin hives after eating foods high in chemicals such as amines or salicylates. Food allergy is NOT the only cause of body symptoms after eating a food.

Symptoms that occur several hours after a food is eaten are more often result of an intolerance to a natural food chemical or an enzyme deficiency and are not allergy.

A food allergy is not:

- ▲ The inability to digest a food
- ▲ An aversion to a food (disliking a food)
- ▲ Food poisoning
- ▲ A reaction to a food additive

5. WHAT CAN I DO?

Do your best to breast feed your baby, at least, until 6 months of age. Introduce solid foods when your baby is 4-6 months old. Introduce one food at a time in small portions and treat foods known to cause allergies the same way as any other, then wait a few days before trying another new food. Introduce the least sensitive types of food first. Start with cereal made from rice, oats or semolina, then follow with cooked fruits and vegetables and then, pureed meats.

See Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCI) Infant Feeding Advice at www.allergy.org.au If your child has a reaction, seek medical advice.

If you are worried about a serious reaction, call an ambulance or go to hospital. If you suspect a food has caused a reaction, avoid that food, talk with your doctor and have it investigated. If you know the child has a food allergy, then always avoid that specific food trigger.

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There are 9 foods that cause 90% of food allergic reactions in Australia. These include peanut, tree nuts like cashews and almonds, egg, milk, fish, shellfish such as prawn and lobster, wheat, soy and sesame. Egg, milk and peanut are the most common food allergies in children although most will grow out of milk and egg allergies. Peanut and tree nut allergies are on the increase and are usually life long.

GET DIAGNOSED

Before you decide you or a family member has a food allergy, talk to your GP or a medical practitioner with experience in food allergy. If your child has symptoms and you are still concerned, get a referral to see an allergy specialist.

Food allergies affect 1%-2% of Australian adults but are estimated to affect around 5% of young children. If you are one of the lucky ones without food allergy, help those that do by taking them seriously. Enjoy your food and help keep those with food allergy safe by considering them and their needs.

There is no cure for food allergy. Avoidance of the food is critical.

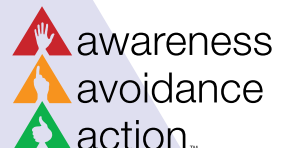
For more information on food allergy, food intolerance and anaphylaxis visit (Anaphylaxis Australia Inc) www.allergyfacts.org.au and (ASCIA) www.allergy.org.au or call **1300 728 000**

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