

FOOD ALLERGIES

EDUCATING YOUR PATIENTS ABOUT FOOD ALLERGIES

Although genetic factors play a role in the development of food allergy, the increased incidence in recent years suggests that food allergy isn't the result of genetic influence alone.

There is insufficient research to suggest that delaying the introduction of potentially allergenic foods into an infant's diet has any benefit in the prevention of food allergies¹. In fact, the opposite may be true and delaying the introduction of solids may increase, rather than decrease food allergy².

Patients may ask how to determine their child's likelihood of developing a food allergy – especially if they are at a stage of introducing solid foods for the first time.

With the wealth of information available, it can be confusing for patients to know what advice to trust. Clear, simple and straightforward dietary advice is welcomed by patients and can be delivered effectively by healthcare professionals in the practice setting.



SYMPTOMS OF AN ALLERGIC REACTION

Rashes
Stomach upset
Coughing
Wheezing
Inflammation/swelling

The supporting leaflet *Learning about and understanding food allergies* can be given to patients to reinforce the messages provided during a consultation.

EXPLAINING FOOD ALLERGIES TO YOUR PATIENTS

Allergies occur when a person's immune system reacts to substances in the environment that are harmless for most people. These substances are known as allergens and are found in house dust mites, pets, pollen, insects, moulds, foods and some medicines¹.

It's important to distinguish between food allergy and intolerance for your patients as they are often confused about the differences.

- An allergic reaction to food involves the immune system responding to an ingested or inhaled substance, most often a protein that the body has characterised as a foreign substance. The immune response triggers the release of antibodies which in turn lead to the release of certain substances – such as histamine – into the tissues. This results in the swelling and inflammation that characterises an allergic reaction to food¹.
- Food intolerance is an abnormal reaction to food, not an immune response. Intolerances are more common than allergies and are generally dose related, occurring after eating or drinking a certain amount of the culprit food or food component³.

SYMPTOMS OF INTOLERANCE

Headaches
Migraines
Bloating
Diarrhoea
Skin reactions



THE TRUTH ABOUT EGG ALLERGIES

Most allergic reactions to egg occur in children between the ages of six and fifteen months when egg is given for the first time, with tolerance often developed by ages three to four years.

Recent research has found the introduction of hen's egg to an infant's diet before the age of six months was not significantly associated with wheezing or eczema at any age.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Infant Feeding Guidelines recommend the transition to solids occur at around six months of age for both infants with and without a family history of food allergy. Foods can be introduced in any order provided iron-rich nutritious foods are included and the texture is suitable for the infant's stage of development.



COMMON FOOD ALLERGIES

In Australia, cow's milk, eggs and nuts cause most of the food allergies in infants and children with eighty percent caused by these three allergens.

Recent research has shown **no** conclusive evidence that the delayed introduction of potentially allergenic foods reduces the development of allergies, either in children considered at risk for the development of allergy or in those not considered to be at risk.

At present, medical history of all immediate family with allergies or asthma is the only viable method to classify children 'at risk'

WHEN SHOULD PATIENTS INTRODUCE POTENTIALLY ALLERGENIC FOODS TO THEIR CHILDREN?

Cow's milk	Cow's milk products such as full fat yoghurt, cheese and custard may be given from around six months however regular cow's milk should not be used as a main drink until after 12 months of age
Eggs	Eggs are a nutritious food that can be introduced from around six months of age as long as the texture is suitable to the infants developmental stage
Nuts	Smooth nut pastes are a nutritious alternative to whole nuts until children are old enough to chew. Nut pastes can be introduced from around six months of age

CONVERSATION STARTERS

"Do you have a family history of allergies?"

"Are you currently breastfeeding?"

"Have you introduced the following foods to your infant's diet?"

Cow's milk, eggs, nuts?"



YOUR DIET DURING PREGNANCY

Maternal dietary intake is a key factor influencing both maternal and fetal health.

As supported by the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy, there is no reason for mothers to restrict their diet during pregnancy².

Please visit www.enc.org.au, allergy.org.au, National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Infant Feeding Guidelines, Better Health Channel, National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Australian Dietary Guidelines, and the Journal of Allergy Clinical Immunology for additional information.

¹ <http://www.allergy.org.au/patients/allergy-prevention/allergy-prevention-in-children>

² National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Australian Dietary Guidelines Infant Feeding Guidelines

³ http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/food_allergy_and_intolerance

⁴ Hill, D.J., C.S. Hosking, and R.G. Heine, Clinical spectrum of food allergy in children in Australia and South-East Asia: identification and targets for treatment. *Ann Med*, 1999. 31(4): p. 272-81.

⁵ Burks, W., et al., Food allergens. *Curr Opin Allergy Clin Immunol*, 2001. 1: p. 243-8.

⁶ Ilse I. M. Tromp, MSc; Jessica C. Kiefte-de Jong, RD, MSc; Ankie Lebon, PhD; (2011). The Introduction of Allergenic Foods. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 165 (10), 933-938.

⁷ Prescott, S.L. and M.L. Tang, The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy position statement: Summary of allergy prevention in children. *Med J Aust*, 2005. 182(9): p. 464-7.

⁸ Osborne, N., et al., HealthNuts Investigators Prevalence of challenge-proven IgE-mediated food allergy using population-based sampling and predetermined challenge criteria in infants. *J. Allergy Clin. Immunol.*, 2011. 127(3): p. 668-672.

⁹ McGowan. CA. Byrne, J. Walsh, J. And McAuliffe, F.M. (2011). Insufficient vitamin D intakes among pregnant women. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 65, 1076-1078.