Caring for Your Child

Food Allergies

A food allergy is the immune system's reaction to a certain food. The body creates a molecule, called IgE antibodies to recognize the food. When these IgE antibodies react with the food, histamine and other chemicals (mediators) are released from various cells within the body. These mediators cause hives, asthma, or other symptoms of an allergic reaction. These reactions occur every time that you are exposed to the food. The most common food allergies are milk, egg, soy, wheat, peanut, tree nut, shellfish and fish.

About 5% of children and 1% of adults have food allergies. Children can outgrow their food allergies to milk, egg, soy, and wheat. This usually occurs by the age of 5. Some children can outgrow peanut allergies. We do not know whether people can outgrow allergies to tree nuts, shellfish and fish.

Problems with food such as lactose intolerance and symptoms after eating MSG are not food allergies.

Symptoms:

Symptoms may occur within minutes after eating the food, but can occur up to 2 hours later. Symptoms of food allergy can include:

- hives
- itching
- swelling of the lips, tongue or mouth
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- throat tightness, difficulty breathing or wheezing

Behavior changes are not symptoms of a food allergy.

Diagnosis:

Food allergy is diagnosed by:

- health history
- skin tests
- food challenges
Skin Test

We will place a drop of the food being tested onto your child’s forearm or back and then prick the skin with a needle. This allows a tiny amount to enter the skin. If your child is allergic to the food, a wheal (mosquito bite-like bump) will form at the site in about 15 minutes.

If there is no wheal, the test is negative. This means that there is a 95% chance that your child is not allergic to the food and he may eat it.

If there is a wheal on the skin, the test is positive. This means that there is a 50% chance that your child is allergic to the food.

Food Challenge

To determine if your child is 100% allergic to the food, we will do a food challenge. We will give your child doses of the food, starting with a small amount and slowly increasing the amount. We will watch him for allergy symptoms (hives, vomiting, and throat tightness). We do this in our office in case your child has a reaction that requires medical treatment.

Treatment:

The only way to treat food allergies is to have your child strictly avoid the foods to which he is allergic. There is no cure or shot for food allergies. The more that you avoid a food, the more likely that your child will outgrow the food allergy.

For more information, visit the websites listed below:

- [www.chop.edu/allergy](http://www.chop.edu/allergy)
- [www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org)
- [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)