

## Paediatric Allergy and Clinical Immunology

### Food Challenge Information – Advice for Families

#### What is food allergy?

Food allergy happens when the body produces allergic antibodies to a food. Eating the food then results in allergic symptoms, which can range from rash or eczema through to severe reactions such as anaphylaxis.

With time, food allergies often go away. Whether a food allergy goes away depends mostly on the food in question. Most milk, egg, wheat and soy allergy resolves. Most peanut, nut and fish allergy will persist in to adulthood.

#### What is a food challenge?

A food challenge may be the only way to determine whether a food allergy has resolved. It may also be used to decide whether a food that has tested positive is a true allergy (sometimes children have a positive test for a food that can be eaten without problems).

Referral for a food challenge will be made after discussion with you, and will generally only be considered if there is a reasonable chance the food will be tolerated. Children with strong positive skin tests or highly positive specific IgE tests (also referred to as RAST) will generally not be offered a challenge.

Food challenges are carried out under supervision at the hospital in case there is a food allergic reaction. Most reactions during challenge are mild and resolve without any treatment or with antihistamine alone. Children can have a severe reaction during food challenge needing treatment with adrenaline. An experienced nurse will administer the challenge and there will always be a doctor immediately available in case of a severe reaction.

Antihistamines should not be given for at least 3 days prior to challenge as they may mask early signs of a reaction. If your child needs ongoing treatment with antihistamines please call us to discuss prior to the challenge.

During the challenge the food will be administered either as a liquid or solid. Initial doses are very small and gradually increased as tolerated. Your child will have consumed the equivalent of a “normal serving” by completion of the challenge (e.g. a glass of milk, a whole egg). The total process (challenge plus observation after challenge) will take a minimum of 4 hours.

Your child may need a lot of encouragement to eat the food. Older children are often quite apprehensive about a food challenge. The dietician will assist with ideas of how to make the food easier for your child to eat.

#### After a food challenge with no reaction

Your child needs to stay under observation for about 2 hours after finishing the challenge food in case any reaction develops.

Once you've gone home, the food in question can be introduced into the diet. There is a suggestion that if your child tolerates peanut then eating peanut regularly may help ensure ongoing tolerance. If there are problems, please contact the immunology nurse specialist. Follow-up will be arranged if there are other food allergies.

#### After a food challenge with a reaction

Your child needs to stay under observation for up to 4 hours after the reaction, and needs to stay until all symptoms have resolved.

The food that caused the reaction needs to continue to be avoided. If necessary, your allergic reaction plan will be updated prior to leaving. Ongoing follow-up will be arranged.

There is no evidence that reacting during a food challenge will make your child's food allergy worse.

## What should I do if my child is sick on the day of the challenge appointment?

Your child needs to be well for the challenge to take place. If he / she has a cough, cold or viral illness, we need to postpone the challenge. Asthma needs to be under good control with no current cough or wheeze.

Having your child as well as possible on the day of the challenge will help to make it obvious if there is a reaction occurring, and minimises the risk of a severe reaction.

If you think that your child should not go ahead with the challenge please advise us as soon as possible. Best to notify by phone or email to the challenge scheduler ([ALTCoutpatients@adhb.govt.nz](mailto:ALTCoutpatients@adhb.govt.nz)). Or phone 3074949 ext 22933).

## Preparing your child for the food challenge

For the older child a food challenge can be scary. Children may be scared of having an allergic reaction, or of the possibility of needing an injection if there is a reaction.

Preparing your child will help to manage these fears. Explain what is going to happen at the challenge. It is best not to build their hopes up too much that their food allergy has resolved, as this can be very disappointing if they have a persistent food allergy.

## Further patient information

1. Australasian allergy web site: [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)
2. American allergy academy web site: [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)
3. UK anaphylaxis web site: [www.anaphylaxis.org.uk](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk)
4. Starship Hospital Information: <http://www.starship.org.nz/index.php/ps>
5. Starship Family Information Service:  
- phone (64 9) 307 4955, - [http://www.starship.org.nz/index.php/pi\\_pageid/1477](http://www.starship.org.nz/index.php/pi_pageid/1477)

## Checklist

### Please check before coming to the food challenge:

- 1) Before the appointment:
  - Prepare your child for the food challenge
  - Give asthma medication regularly as prescribed by your GP
  - Call the scheduler if your child is sick ([ALTCoutpatients@adhb.govt.nz](mailto:ALTCoutpatients@adhb.govt.nz)). Or phone 3074949 ext 22933)
- 2) On the day you may want to bring:
  - your preferred foods to combine with the challenge food (e.g. special milk, crackers, bread, own yoghurt (soy or dairy), pasta, rice, tinned fruit)
  - other food / drink items your child may need
  - cups, bottles, spoons or dishes
  - a change of clothing for your child (in case they are sick)
  - a pram for young children
  - food and drink for yourself
  - Bring medication including:
    - asthma medication (all puffers and spacers)
    - eczema medication
    - allergy kit including antihistamine and adrenaline auto-injector
    - other regular medications