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All About Food Allergies



It is estimated that around 8% of kids in the U.S. have a food allergy. You can have an allergy to any food, but the most common foods that kids are allergic to are milk, eggs, wheat, soy, and peanuts. We used to think that waiting to offer these foods would help protect against food allergies, but more recent studies show just the opposite! It is now usually recommended to offer these foods earlier in life to help prevent food allergies.

What is a food allergy?

Food allergies happen when the body mistakes the food as something harmful and tries to attack it, causing the symptoms seen during an allergic reaction. Symptoms of food allergies can range from mild to life-threatening and may require immediate medical attention. Some symptoms happen right away, while others may take up to a few days to appear. It is also possible to have a food intolerance or sensitivity, but these are usually less severe than food allergies.

What are some symptoms of a food allergy?

Symptoms may include:

- Hives, Rash, Flushed Skin, Eczema, or Itching
- Nausea or Stomach Pain
- Vomiting or Diarrhea
- Difficulty Breathing, Wheezing, or Coughing
- Swelling or Tightness of Throat or Vocal Cords
- Tingling or Itchy Mouth
- Tongue, Face, or Lip Swelling
- Dizziness or Lightheadedness
- Drop in Blood Pressure
- Anaphylaxis
 - A very serious, possibly life-threatening condition which may include symptoms like: extreme difficulty breathing, fainting, change in skin color, severe vomiting, or extreme face, tongue, or lip swelling

What should I do if I think my child is having an allergic reaction to a food?

If your child is having a mild reaction, call your child's healthcare provider right away and let them know what food you gave and when. If your child is having a severe reaction (extreme difficulty breathing, fainting, change in skin color, severe vomiting, or extreme face, tongue, or lip swelling), it may be anaphylaxis, a serious and potentially life-threatening condition. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Is there anything I can do to help prevent food allergies?

- It is recommended that babies receive only breastmilk for about the first 4-6 months of life, as breastfeeding may decrease the risk of food allergies. Moms who breastfeed do not usually need to avoid any foods in their diet unless their baby is already showing signs of having a food allergy and it is recommended by their healthcare provider.
- Recent research shows that giving small amounts of more commonly allergic foods (like eggs or peanuts) around 6 months of age or earlier may help prevent allergies. Since every baby is different, you should always check with your healthcare provider before giving your baby anything other than breastmilk or formula.
 - If your baby is at higher risk for having a food allergy, your healthcare provider may want you to give foods differently.



When and how should I start introducing foods to my baby?*

When your baby is ready to start trying foods and you have checked with their healthcare provider or WIC Nutritionist:

- Only offer new foods when you can put all your attention on your baby and can watch them closely for at least 2 hours after.
- It may take up to a few days for some symptoms to show up, so it is important to wait 3-5 days after giving each new food before giving another new food.
- Start with single foods (like pureed chicken) to make sure your baby does not have a reaction.
 - Only offer foods with more than one ingredient (like pureed fruit blends or macaroni & cheese) after you have tried each food on its own first and your baby has not had a reaction.
- Start with small amounts (1-2 tablespoons at a time). Your baby still has a tiny tummy and will continue to get most of their nutrition from breastmilk or formula until age 1, so they do not need large amounts of food.
- If you have any other questions about when or how to offer foods to your baby, contact your healthcare provider or WIC Nutritionist.

***If your baby was born prematurely or has certain health conditions, you may need to wait until they are a bit older before giving foods. Check with your healthcare provider or WIC Nutritionist.**



As you are starting to give new foods to your baby, you can include dairy, egg, soy, wheat, peanut, and fish unless your healthcare provider tells you otherwise.

- Dairy foods like yogurt and cheese can be offered but, wait to offer cow's milk (to drink) until your child has turned 1.
- You should NOT give your baby peanut butter straight from the jar because it is too sticky for your baby to safely eat. Instead, peanuts can be offered in one of the following ways:
 - 2 teaspoons peanut butter thinned with 2-3 teaspoons water, breastmilk, or formula.
 - 2 teaspoons peanut butter or powdered peanut butter mixed with 2-3 tablespoons of a pureed food they have already eaten safely.
 - In a meltable peanut containing snack like a peanut puff.

Help! I just found out my child has a food allergy! What should I do?

It is important that your child avoids the food they are allergic to.

- Talk with your child's healthcare provider to develop a plan, including what to look for and what to do in case they get the food on accident.
- Call your WIC clinic and set up an appointment with your WIC Nutritionist to learn about reading labels and how to avoid problem foods.
- Teach anyone else who may take care of your child (family members, friends, babysitters, daycare staff, etc.) about your child's food allergy. Make sure they know what foods to avoid and what to do if they think your child is having a reaction.

Unfortunately, if your child has one food allergy, they may be at higher risk for another food allergy. So, it is important that you continue to watch for symptoms as you add more foods to their diet. It may even be helpful to keep a diary of what foods you offer and when so you can watch for any reactions that may occur.

The good news is that some (but not all) children can "outgrow" food allergies as they get older. If your child has a food allergy you should **always** talk to their healthcare provider before trying to offer that food again in the future.



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