



ARE YOU WORRIED THAT YOUR TODDLER MAY SUFFER FROM A FOOD ALLERGY OR INTOLERANCE?



GUIDANCE & TIPS FOR PARENTS

Food allergy and Food Intolerance may both cause unpleasant symptoms. They differ in the ways in which a 'culprit' food can cause them.

What is food allergy?

Food allergy is when the body reacts to certain foods - by an abnormal immunological reaction to the food. Some reactions such as hives (urticaria) or swelling of the lips or tongue, happen very quickly. Other reactions, such as eczema, vomiting or constipation, may be delayed. Reactions range from mild to severe and there may be some overlap between these two groups of symptoms. In some rare cases, allergic reactions to food can be life threatening.

What are the symptoms and signs of food allergy?

Symptoms and signs caused by food allergies can appear within two hours of eating a food. They include:

- asthma
- breathing difficulties
- eczema flare
- hives
- itching
- pallor
- rashes
- redness
- swelling of lips, tongue, face
- sudden diarrhoea
- vomiting
- wheeze

Some symptoms may appear much later, such as:

- abdominal pain or colic
- bloating
- constipation
- diarrhoea
- eczema
- reflux
- vomiting (few hours after meal)
- wheeze
- wind

What is food intolerance?

Food intolerance usually causes a more delayed reaction, occurring hours or even days after eating certain foods. The immune system is not involved in this type of reaction and therefore food intolerance is not life threatening. Typical symptoms include abdominal pain (tummy ache), diarrhoea and vomiting.

What are the symptoms and signs of food intolerance?

- bloating
- constipation
- diarrhoea
- vomiting
- wind

Foods or food ingredients can also cause migraine and occasionally behavioural problems. In some children, fruit and vegetables, especially citrus fruits and tomato may cause a harmless, rash around the mouth due to their acidity.

More information is available at

- www.allergyaction.org
- www.allergynetwork.org
- www.allergyuk.org
- www.anaphylaxis.org.uk
- www.kidsaware.co.uk
- www.yellowcross.co.uk

Which foods could my child be allergic/intolerant to?

There is a wide range of foods, but the most common ones are: celery, cereals containing gluten – wheat, rye, barley and oats – cows' milk, eggs, fish, mustard, peanuts and tree nuts, sesame seeds, shellfish, soya and sulphur dioxide.

How common are food allergies and intolerances?

2-4 per cent of 1-3 year olds suffer from food allergies or intolerances.

How a diagnosis is made?

Your health visitor will refer your toddler to the GP. (In some cases experienced health visitors may suggest the avoidance of a certain food for a trial period). Your GP may refer your child to a paediatrician or allergy clinic. Your child may need to undergo a skin prick test or blood test. When performing skin prick tests, a drop of the suspected food allergen is placed on the skin and pricked.

The results are available within ten minutes and the test is not painful. Because these tests are not 100 per cent diagnostic, you may be asked to keep a food and symptom diary followed by a special test diet to identify the foods causing symptoms.

How to manage your toddler's food allergy or intolerance

The only way to manage a food allergy or intolerance is to avoid the food which is causing the problem. Some toddlers with food allergies will need to avoid the food completely. Others may be able to tolerate small amounts of the food they are allergic to. Most children with food intolerance can eat small amounts of the food with no harmful effects. It is important to know which foods to avoid, how to check food labels and to what level each food should be avoided. A dietitian will give the best help. How meticulous you need to be will be different for each child. With the correct management symptoms should resolve. If they do not, then return to the allergy clinic for reassessment and advice.



An educational forum on infant and toddler nutrition and development

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