

GENERAL GUIDELINES ON THE MANAGEMENT OF FOOD HYPERSENSITIVITY

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LEARNING POINTS

- 1 The key to managing food hypersensitivity is to exclude the culprit food(s) from the toddler's diet.
- 2 A dietitian can advise on how to exclude a food while maintaining a healthy balanced diet.
- 3 Parents should be shown how to read food labels to identify culprit ingredients and how to avoid cross contamination.
- 4 Special care must be taken when the child is eating away from home – all those involved in food preparation should be informed of which ingredients are to be avoided.
- 5 A 'chef card' can help inform others of what foods a toddler should and should not eat.
- 6 If in doubt about a food's ingredients, parents should not let their child eat it.
- 7 Parents should be encouraged to adapt their usual recipes and to try out new ones. There are many special diet cookbooks that contain guidance for the preparation of suitable meals.
- 8 Healthcare professionals should be able to identify and access information on special diet products.

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MANAGEMENT OF FOOD HYPERSENSITIVITY



Once a toddler has been diagnosed with food hypersensitivity the only effective management is to avoid the culprit food(s). The extent to which the food needs to be avoided will vary from toddler to toddler.

Some children need to avoid the food completely – even in trace amounts. Others may be able to tolerate small amounts of the food. The doctor and/or dietitian should be able to advise mothers regarding the level of avoidance required. Most toddlers with non-allergic food hypersensitivity are able to include small amounts of the culprit food in their diet with no adverse effects.

Unsupervised elimination diets can lead to an imbalanced intake of food and even nutrient deficiencies.

HOW TO HELP PARENTS MANAGE THEIR TODDLER'S FOOD HYPERSENSITIVITY

Parents can look after their toddler's food hypersensitivity successfully by planning, using common sense, and by being determined not to take chances with risky foods.

It is however important that a dietitian advises how to ensure that the toddler's diet is nutritionally balanced. The dietitian will also provide guidance on suitable food substitutes for food that causes an allergic reaction.

When shopping

Shopping for a special diet can be a challenge for parents at first, but usually gets easier. Reading food labels is very important, especially those on foods that have been recently modified by the manufacturer. They often have 'new' or 'improved' printed on the label.

There are now special 'free-from' foods available such as egg-free, milk-free, wheat-free, and nut-free. A dietitian will be able to advise about the appropriate use of these products.

Food labelling legislation introduced across Europe in November 2005¹ requires allergens to be clearly marked on all foods and should make it easier for parents to identify products that their toddler should avoid [see Factsheet 4.2](#).

Examples of 'free-from' foods



Most supermarkets and manufacturers also produce 'free-from' lists on which all their own-brand products are listed according to their suitability for various diets. Parents should ensure that they are using an up-to-date list and manufacturers should clearly record the date at which the list was last updated. However, the foods labels still need to be checked each time.

Examples of foods and ingredients that should be avoided by toddlers hypersensitive to:

Milk

Butter, casein, cheese, cow/sheep/goat's milk, evaporated or condensed milk, cream, curd, ghee, lactoglobulin, lactose, milk solids, whey, yogurt, milk proteins. [see Factsheet 4.3i](#)

Egg

Albumin, dried egg, egg powder, egg protein, egg white and yolk, frozen egg, globulin, lecithin (E322)*, livetin, ovalbumin, ovoglobulin, ovomucin, ovovittellin, pasteurised egg, vitellin.

[see Factsheet 4.3ii](#)

* only lecithin derived from egg, which will be stated.

Wheat

Bran, cereal filler, farina, flour, starch, vegetable protein, wheat, durum wheat, semolina, couscous.

[see Factsheet 4.3iii](#)

Fish

Anchovy (Worcestershire sauce), aspic, caviar.

[see Factsheet 4.3iv](#)

Nuts

Peanuts, peanut oil which is also called arachis oil/hypogeaia, peanut flour, peanut protein or any of the tree nuts: Almond, Hazelnut, Walnut, Cashew nut, Pecan nut, Brazil nut, Pistachio nut, Macadamia nut and Queensland nut. 'Refined' peanut oil appears to be safe (given recent evidence) but if it does not specify that it is 'refined' – avoid.

[see Factsheet 4.3v](#)

Do not need to avoid coconut, palm nut, nutmeg, butternut squash and pine nuts unless a specific problem with it.

Soya

Hydrolysed vegetable protein, soya lecithin, soya sauce, miso, soya albumin, soya beans, soya flour, soya milk, soya nuts, soya oil, soya proteins, soya sprouts, tempeh, texturised vegetable protein, tofu.

[see Factsheet 4.3vi](#)

This is not an exhaustive list and [Factsheets 4.3i-4.3vi](#) provide more detailed information on each food group.

Some manufacturers provide allergen information on the packaging such as: 'This product contains milk, egg, etc.' This is not legally required and can therefore not always be relied on. It is advisable always to read the ingredient list.

When cooking

Parents should be encouraged to modify their usual recipes and to try out new ones. There are many special diet cookbooks which can help them to prepare suitable meals, snacks and bakery items. A dietitian or someone who has a food allergy may be able to recommend well-tested recipes. Below is an example of a recipe suitable for children unable to tolerate milk. Further recipes can be found in **Allergy-free food** by Tanya Wright².

Raisin and oatmeal cookies (milk-free)

Ingredients – makes 20 cookies

100g/4oz milk-free margarine
50g/2oz granulated sugar
50g/2oz light brown sugar
1 egg
1 tsp vanilla essence
125g/4oz plain flour
1/2 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp bicarbonate of soda
75g/3oz porridge oats
150g/6oz raisins

Method

Preheat oven 190°C, 375°F, gas mark 5. Cream margarine & sugars. Add egg and essence. Sift flour, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda. Beat. Add raisins and oats. Form dough into 20 walnut sized balls. Place on greased baking tray – press down. Bake for 12 minutes until golden brown. Wire rack to cool

Cook's tip

Try adding chocolate chips and cherries



Raisin and Oatmeal cookies can also be egg free by replacing the egg with 1 tsp of baking powder or egg replacer.

Source: Allergy-free food by Tanya Wright².

An example of a Chef Card

To the Chef:

WARNING! I am allergic to _____.

In order to avoid a life-threatening reaction, I must avoid all foods that might contain

_____, including these ingredients:

Please ensure that my food does not contain any of these ingredients, and that any utensils and equipment used to prepare my meal, as well as prep surfaces are thoroughly cleaned prior to use.

Thanks for your cooperation.

Blank form courtesy of the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network

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Eating with friends or family

Parents should discuss the menu with whoever is preparing the food beforehand and recommend suitable choices, avoiding the food or foods the toddler does not tolerate. It is important that parents ask questions about the ingredients and the method of food preparation to avoid possible cross-contamination. It is also important to make sure the toddler does not pick up food from the floor or someone else's plate. Keeping the menu simple helps.

Preventing cross-contamination

Advise parents to:

- wash hands thoroughly using a detergent
- wash cooking utensils thoroughly
- take special care when washing chopping boards and work surfaces (wooden chopping boards are particularly hard to clean)
- not use the same oil for cooking different foods
- not use the same spoon for serving different food
- preferably keep the menu free from the allergic food for everyone to reduce the risk of cross-contamination
- keep sponges and clothes clean

At buffets

Buffet style meals can be challenging for people with food hypersensitivity because the ingredients of the foods on display are not always known. Some parents prefer to take their own food with them. Alternatively, arriving early at a party can give parents the opportunity to check the labels and to serve their toddler first in order to avoid potential cross-contamination from one food to another.

Advise parents that if their toddler suffers from a severe or immediate type food allergy, and the parent is not confident about the ingredients of the food, the food should be avoided.

Eating out

Eating in restaurants can be risky because parents cannot scrutinise the ingredient labels. Advise parents to call ahead and ask to speak with the manager or chef who can give information regarding the menu so that they can discuss alternative safe options.

It is important that parents ask questions about the ingredients and the method of food preparation so that they are assured that the food will be safe to eat.

When ordering food, parents should ask the person who is preparing the food to be aware of cross-contamination and to double-check the ingredients. It is not usually adequate to rely on the opinion of waiters as to the presence of a particular ingredient in a dish. They are not likely to be fully aware of all the ingredients, particularly as some chefs prefer to keep their recipes a secret.

In the US it has become fashionable to carry a chef card that outlines the foods that must be avoided (see above). The card can be presented to the chef or manager and serves as a reminder of the food allergy. Some people have had this information printed on business cards. If parents choose to develop a chef card they should keep the following in mind:

- print the information on brightly coloured paper
- print several copies of the chef card so that a few extra copies are available
- laminate the chef card so that it does not get damaged or stained
- check the information with their dietitian

Parents should, however, never rely on the chef card in the place of consultation with the waiter and/or manager of a restaurant.

More information is available at:

- www.allergyaction.org
- www.anaphylaxis.org.uk
- www.allergyuk.org

At the nursery

Some parents can be anxious about entrusting a nursery to feed their toddler. Hidden ingredients, cross contact between foods, and the fear of allergens left on lunch tables often cause concern, especially if the toddler is suffering from an immediate/severe type of allergy.

Parents should always inform the nursery staff of the toddler's food hypersensitivity. Most food service staff are educated about food hypersensitivity and parents should advise staff on what to avoid and how to substitute it. In addition, parents should provide the nursery with an updated list of ingredients to avoid and make staff aware that they should not rely on lists of 'safe' pre-packaged food because ingredients can change without warning, making such lists out-of-date quickly. If in any doubt, parents should ask to read the labels themselves. Parents can ask to view the food service guidelines regarding food preparation, the prevention of cross-contamination when serving food and cleaning procedures.

Picnics and barbecues

Parents can talk to those in charge of the food to be sure they know about the toddler's food hypersensitivity, or pack their own picnic basket.

Extra care should be taken with barbecue sauces or the chef's 'special ingredients'. If there is any uncertainty about the ingredients (especially in the case of severe allergies) – the toddler should avoid the food.

Taking a disposable barbecue gives a safer option to reduce cross-contamination.



Translation sheets

When travelling abroad translation sheets can be obtained from www.allergyaction.org, www.allergyuk.org, www.kidsaware.co.uk or www.yellowcross.co.uk. These translation sheets can be used to inform others about the toddler's food hypersensitivity, and lists the individual food ingredients to avoid when travelling. The Anaphylaxis Campaign also provides food allergy sufferers with useful information at www.anaphylaxis.org.uk.



Summary

Staying safe while eating can be challenging, especially when a toddler has a severe food allergy. However, toddlers with delayed type allergy and non-allergic food hypersensitivity may be able to tolerate small amounts of the food as advised by their doctor or dietitian.

Advise those parents who have a toddler who should avoid even the smallest traces of the food that he/she is allergic to:

- always inform people regarding the child's food hypersensitivity beforehand
- ask for help if needed
- ask the host/manager/chef to show the ingredient labels so parents can check for foods their toddler is allergic to
- serve the toddler first and watch out for any form of cross-contact i.e. foods touching other foods, or someone using the same utensil to mix or scoop from different dishes
- always carry necessary medication

Parents can always bring some food that they are sure is safe for their toddler. This way they will know that there will be something their toddler can safely eat.

Finally, toddlers avoiding certain food(s) because of food hypersensitivity should be regularly assessed by a doctor and/or dietitian.

References

1. European Union. Directive 2003/89/EC of the European Parliament (Annex IIIA) Article 6(3a), (10) and (11). *Official Journal of the European Union* 2003;(L 308):15-18.
2. Wright T. Allergy-free food. London: Hamlyn, 2002.

Further Reading

1. British Nutrition Foundation Task Force. Adverse reactions to food. Buttriss J, editor. Oxford: Blackwell Science Ltd, 2002.
2. Vickerstaff Joneja J. Dietary management of food allergies and intolerances. 2nd ed. Vancouver: J.A. Hall, 1998.
3. Wright T. Food Allergies - enjoying life with a severe food allergy. 2nd ed. London: Class Publishing Ltd, 2006.

Additional copies of this Factsheet can be downloaded from www.infantandtoddlerforum.org



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MANAGING FOOD HYPERSENSITIVITY GUIDANCE & TIPS FOR PARENTS



If your toddler has been diagnosed with a food allergy or intolerance, it is important that you follow the advice your doctor or dietitian gives you about what your child may and may not eat.

If you have been advised that your toddler should avoid even the smallest amounts of certain foods then:

- if someone else is preparing food always tell them about your child's food allergies/intolerances beforehand
- ask the person preparing the food or in charge of food preparation to show you ingredient labels or recipes
- where possible offer to help with food preparation
- you can develop a 'chef card'. This is a small card that lists the foods that your toddler must avoid. It can be carried around to inform others of what foods your toddler can and cannot eat.
- if you are not sure how safe foods will be, bring your own food or carry some snacks that your toddler can eat
- always carry necessary medication

The following guidelines will help you in coping with your toddler's food allergy. It is important to ask to see a dietitian who will be able to advise you on how to make sure that your toddler's diet is nutritionally balanced. A dietitian can also advise you on suitable food substitutes.

HOW CAN YOU SAFELY MANAGE YOUR TODDLER'S FOOD ALLERGIES OR INTOLERANCES?

You can avoid problems by planning, using common sense, and by being determined not to take chances with risky foods. Some manufacturers provide allergen information on the packaging such as: 'This product contains milk, egg etc'. This information is not legally required and can therefore not always be relied on. It is advisable to always read the ingredients list.

When shopping

Shopping for a special diet can be difficult at first, but should get easier. Reading food labels is very important especially those with 'new' or 'improved' printed on them. Culprit foods may have many different names. See checklist of the most common culprit foods.

There are now special 'free-from' foods available such as egg-free, milk-free, wheat-free, and nut-free. A dietitian will be able to advise you about the suitable use of these products.

Most supermarkets and manufacturers also provide 'free-from' lists on which all their own-brand products are listed according to their suitability for various diets. Always make sure that you have an up-to-date list. However, food labels still need to be checked.

When cooking

Many recipes can be adapted to use an alternative to the problem ingredient. Try out some new recipes that are suitable. There are many special diet cookbooks with suitable meals, snacks and baked foods for special diets. A dietitian or someone with food allergy may be able to give you some well-tested recipes.

When eating away from home

Try to discuss the menu with the host/chef/restaurant manager beforehand and make recommendations regarding suitable choices, avoiding the food or foods your toddler should not eat.

It is important to ask questions regarding ingredients and food preparation.

Remember to ask about the cleaning of utensils and serving of foods because cross-contamination can happen. It is also important to make sure your toddler does not pick food up from the floor or someone else's plate.

You should ask to check food labels and ingredients whenever possible by either calling ahead or arriving early. If you have a chef card, now is the time to use it. Always ask the person who is preparing your food if you have not had time to check beforehand.

It is not adequate to rely on the word of a waiter or the person serving the food if a specific dish contains a particular ingredient. They are not likely to be fully aware of all the ingredients.

Always remember that it is better to avoid foods if you do not know the ingredients, especially if your child has a severe food allergy.

Checklist of foods and ingredients to avoid by toddlers hypersensitive to:

Milk

Butter, casein, cheese, cow/sheep/goat's milk, evaporated or condensed milk, cream, curd, ghee, lactoglobulin, lactose, milk solids, whey, yogurt.

Egg

Albumin, dried egg, egg powder, egg protein, egg white and yolk, frozen egg, globulin, lecithin (E322)*, livetin, ovalbumin, ovoglobulin, ovomucin, ovovittellin, pasteurised egg, vitellin.

* only lecithin derived from egg, which will be stated.

Wheat

Bran, cereal filler, farina, flour, starch, vegetable protein, wheat, durum wheat, semolina, couscous, bread, pizza, biscuits, cake, anything with pastry

Fish

Anchovy, Worcestershire sauce, aspic, caviar.

Nuts

Peanuts, peanut oil which is also called arachis oil/hypogeia, peanut flour, peanut protein or any of the tree nuts: Almond, Hazelnut, Walnut, Cashew nut, Pecan nut, Brazil nut, Pistachio nut, Macadamia nut and Queensland nut. 'Refined' peanut oil appears to be safe (given recent evidence) but if it does not specify that it is 'refined' – avoid.

Do not need to avoid coconut, palm nut, nutmeg, butternut squash and pine nuts unless a specific problem with it.

Soya

Hydrolysed vegetable protein, soya lecithin, soya sauce, miso, soya albumin, soya beans, soya flour, soya milk, soya nuts, soya oil, soya proteins, soya sprouts, tempeh, texturised vegetable protein, tofu.

www.allergyaction.org, www.allergyuk.org, www.kidsaware.co.uk or www.yellowcross.co.uk provide translation sheets for families travelling abroad. These will inform people about your toddler's food allergy or intolerance, and also give you a list of food ingredients to look out for while you are travelling. The anaphylaxis campaign (www.anaphylaxis.org.uk) also provides useful information for those with food allergies.



An educational forum on infant and toddler nutrition and development

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