



Health Talk: Food Allergy By: Dr. Rima Sanka



My name is Dr. Rima Sanka and I recently completed my fellowship training at USF in Adult and Pediatric Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology. One of the main roles played by allergists is to educate patients on what their true allergies are, how to avoid them, and how to treat and/or cure them so they may live a healthy lifestyle. I hope that this column will answer some of the common questions, verify or refute common allergy myths, and empower you to make positive decisions with regard to your health and allergies.

Food allergy is an abnormal response of the immune system. It typically occurs in the first several years of life. There are about eight million children in the United States that have food allergy and about four million adults. The most common food allergies in children are milk, egg, soy, wheat, and peanut. The eight most common food allergies overall are milk, egg, soy, wheat, and peanut, tree nuts, fish and shellfish.

How is food allergy diagnosed?

It takes a combination of a really good medical history and then looking for IgE either by skin prick testing or serum test called a RAST test - this stands for radioallergosorbent test which is a serum test that measures allergy antibody specific for a particular food.

A positive test to either one of these indicates that a patient may be allergic to that food. It must be correlated back with the clinical condition of that child or adult when eating that food to determine the relevance of that positive test. Positive tests with no history of reaction are often false positives and avoidance is usually not necessary. Negative tests offer more valuable information because allergy is highly unlikely if IgE is not present (by blood or skin).

Food allergy needs to be differentiated from food intolerance. Food intolerance is something spe-

cific to an individual. An example of food intolerance might be lactose intolerance in which there is a lack of an enzyme in the gastrointestinal tract that breaks down lactose. When someone with lactose intolerance drinks milk products, they have excessive gas or diarrhea because of the lack of that digestion.

How can you prevent food allergy?

What we do know is that, if you have an immediate family history - a mother, father, one of the siblings, if they have an allergic disease - then your child is at a higher risk for developing allergies. What you do while you're pregnant, we really do not understand well. The two best things you can do after delivery that may prevent any type of allergic disease, not just food allergy, are breastfeeding for at least four to six months exclusively and not giving your child solid foods for that same period of time. It's also important to avoid introducing the very allergenic foods until later, although the actual benefit of this is controversial and conflicting information has been reported recently.

- Hold milk until one year of age
- Hold eggs until two years of age
- Hold peanuts/tree nuts until three years of age

Food allergens do cross the placenta and into the breast milk. There is a small benefit to avoiding

highly allergenic foods during pregnancy and lactation in high risk families.

To successfully manage a food allergy, your diet and lifestyle must change. These changes may seem challenging and overwhelming at first, but it gets easier over time. Learning how to read ingredient labels correctly and accurately is the first step. Several websites such as FAAN's www.foodallergy.org give great advice on doing this and examples of what commonly cross contaminated foods to watch out for. For example, most people do not know that sunflower seeds often contain traces of peanut due to the way they are manufactured. On the other hand, most people who are allergic to peanut can eat peanut oil safely.

"High risk" allergy foods include desserts, sauces, pastry-covered dishes, and fried foods.

Food allergy can be outgrown. Milk and egg allergies tend to resolve by school age, but peanut allergy lasts forever in up to 80% of children.

If your child has been identified with a food allergy, carrying an injectable epinephrine device in case of an accidental ingestion is essential and can mean the difference between life and death. MedicAlert bracelets are also helpful to notify health-care professionals of important allergies if a patient is ever found unconscious or non-responsive.

The Health Advisory

Simple Steps to a Healthier You

Why all this hype about physical fitness and exercise? What is physical fitness?

Physical fitness is a condition or state of being that helps you look, feel and do your best. It is the ability to do tasks full of energy, and still be able to do other things with your time, such as house and yard work, schoolwork or activities with family and friends. It is a basis for good health and well-being. Fitness involves performance of the heart and lungs, and the muscles of the body. Fitness can also influence how alert you are and how you feel emotionally.

A Few Benefits to Exercise

Exercise is an important part of a lifetime of good health! Exercising can also be fun and is something you can do with friends. It also can help you:

- Feel less stressed
- Boost your self-esteem
- Feel more ready to learn new things
- Keep a healthy weight
- Build and keep healthy bones, muscles, and joints

There are many ways it can help you, both today and in the future.

SHORT TERM, LONG TERM BENEFITS

Short-term benefits of exercise are the body's responses right after starting. The long-term benefits are improvements that occur over weeks, months, and years from regular exercising or training.

Some short-term benefits include:

- Helps you feel good about yourself
- Relaxes and refreshes your body

- Gives you a break from daily routines and worries

Some long-term benefits include:

- Lowers high blood pressure
- Helps you lose weight and gain strength the healthy way by lowering body fat and increasing muscle
- Lowers risk of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and osteoporosis (bone loss)

Most people can benefit from exercise. In fact, making physical activity a regular part of your life early on is one of the most important things you can do to improve your health. If you have an injury or think there is a health related reason why you may not be able to exercise safely, talk with your doctor before starting a new exercise program or sport. You should also talk with a doctor first if you have:

- Asthma
- High blood pressure

- Heart trouble
- Dizzy spells
- Extreme breathlessness after physical activity
- Arthritis or bone problems
- Severe muscle, ligament, or tendon problems
- Fatigue or feel tired most of the time

GET MOVING!

The more time you spend in front of the television or playing video games, the less time you have to be active. Not being active is called sedentary (say: sed-un-tair-ee). Leading a sedentary lifestyle can cause weight gain and even obesity (dangerously high weight), which can lead to Type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol levels, and high blood pressure. These three health issues can hurt your heart and make it easier for you to get certain diseases. Make physical activity a regular part of your life. It can help you protect your health!