

**Is your child at a  
HIGH RISK for developing  
a food allergy?**

Do you have a personal history of allergies (i.e., food allergy, allergic eczema, allergic rhinitis [hay fever], asthma, or allergy to furry animals, pollens, dust mites, or mold)?

Yes  No

Does your spouse have a personal history of allergies?

Yes  No

Do any of your children have a personal history of allergies?

Yes  No

If you have answered yes to any of these questions and you are pregnant or nursing, talk to your doctor about food allergy prevention methods.

**Additional INFORMATION**

For more information about food allergies, contact:

The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network  
10400 Eaton Place, Suite 107  
Fairfax, VA 22030-2208  
Phone: (800) 929-4040  
Fax: (703) 691-2713  
Website: <http://www.foodallergy.org>  
E-mail: [faan@foodallergy.org](mailto:faan@foodallergy.org)

Write to us or visit our website for a list of other publications that may be of interest to you, including our *Food Allergy News Cookbook*, vols. 1 and 2; "How to Read a Label" cards; and educational books, programs, and videos.

The following organizations may also be sources of useful information:

American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology  
(800) 842-7777  
[www.allergy.mcg.edu](http://www.allergy.mcg.edu)

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology  
(800) 822-2762  
[www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)

American Academy of Pediatrics  
(800) 433-9016  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

American Dietetic Association  
(800) 877-1600  
[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

Funded by grants from:

 **Provident** **ACAAI** American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology  
BANK

**Preventing  
or  
Delaying  
the Onset of  
FOOD ALLERGIES  
in  
Infants**



## Food Allergy BASICS

### What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is caused when a person's immune system mistakenly believes that a harmless substance, in this case a food, is harmful. In its attempt to protect the body, it creates specific IgE (immunoglobulin E) antibodies to that food. The next time the individual eats that food, the immune system releases massive amounts of chemicals and histamines. These chemicals trigger a cascade of allergic symptoms that can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin, or cardiovascular system.

### Who is at risk for developing a food allergy?

Robert S. Zeiger, M.D., Ph.D., a member of FAAN's Medical Advisory Board, reports, "Infants born to families in which at least one parent or sibling has a personal history of allergy (allergic rhinitis [hay fever], asthma, food allergy, or allergic eczema) may have as high as a 20 percent chance of developing food allergies in the first 5 to 7 years of life. Food allergy is less common in families without a personal history of allergies."

### How does a food allergy develop?

A food allergy develops when an infant's immune system creates antibodies to a specific food the first time that food is eaten. The next time the food is eaten, the infant or child may experience symptoms of a food allergy. Some infants with a family history of allergy may be made allergic to certain food allergens when they are ingested in minute amounts in their mothers' breast milk. Infants at risk for allergy may also become allergic to cow's milk and soy proteins in infant formulas.

### When will a food allergy typically develop?

Although it is estimated that approximately 6 percent of all children may develop a food allergy by the age of 2, studies suggest infants with a family history of allergy may be two to four times more likely to develop an allergy.

"Since infancy is an especially vulnerable time for food allergies to develop, allergy prevention efforts must be started immediately after birth to be effective," says Dr. Zeiger.

### What foods are allergenic?

Milk, egg, and soy are the most frequent causes of food allergy in infants. Unfortunately, peanut allergy appears to be increasing in infancy as parents introduce peanut butter products too early in life. As the baby grows and begins to eat "table" foods, other food allergies may develop. Eight foods account for 90 percent of all food-allergic reactions: peanuts, tree nuts (walnuts, pecans, etc.), fish, shellfish, eggs, milk, soy, and wheat. However, any food can cause an allergic reaction. Peanuts are the leading cause of severe allergic reactions, followed by shellfish, fish, tree nuts, and eggs.

### How common is food allergy?

Approximately 4 to 6 percent of infants and young children develop food allergy. One to two percent of the general population, or six to seven million Americans, may suffer from food allergy. Doctors report an increase in the number of patients with food allergies in this country.

### What are the symptoms of a food allergy?

Symptoms range from a tingling sensation in the mouth, swelling of the tongue and the throat, rash, eczema, hives and swelling, vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, wheezing, difficulty breathing, drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness, and (very rarely) death. Symptoms typically appear within minutes to two hours after the person has eaten the food to which he or she is allergic.

## Preventing or Delaying the ONSET of Food Allergy

### Breast feeding

Exclusive breast feeding for the first 6 months of life is

recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) for almost all newborns. No other food is needed during the first 6 months of life, since breast milk provides the ideal nutrition for the growing infant. Compared to infants fed cow's milk or soy milk formula, infants who are exclusively breast fed for a prolonged period develop less eczema and recurrent wheezing in the first several years of life.

### Maternal avoidance diets

In a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, researchers concluded that peanut protein is secreted into breast milk, which may sensitize an infant who is at risk for developing a food allergy. Milk, eggs, and wheat have also been shown to be in breast milk.

The AAP recommends nursing mothers eliminate peanuts and tree nuts from their diets while nursing. Consult with your doctor regarding the need to eliminate other foods (such as eggs, cow's milk, and fish) while nursing.

### Hypoallergenic formulas

The AAP recommends using hypoallergenic formulas such as Alimentum® and Nutramigen®, if necessary, to supplement breast feeding. Cow's milk allergy and allergic eczema have been shown to be reduced in high-risk infants who take these hypoallergenic formulas compared to cow's milk and soy milk formulas.

### Introduction of solid food

The introduction of solid foods to a food-allergic or allergy-prone infant should be delayed. According to the AAP, "Solid foods should not be introduced into the diet of high-risk infants until 6 months of age, with dairy products delayed until 1 year, eggs until 2 years, and peanuts, nuts, and fish until 3 years of age." Before introducing such highly allergenic foods to your child, talk to your doctor.