

Food Allergy

Overview

People with food allergies have abnormal reactions to proteins in foods that normal people do not have. We do not know what triggers foods allergies but they tend to run in families. There are 8 foods which account for approximately 90 percent of all food allergies. They are;

- Cow's milk
- Eggs
- Fish
- Peanuts
- Shellfish
- Soy
- Tree nuts
- Wheat

Food allergy and food intolerance may present with similar symptoms, but it is important to understand the differences. When a person has a food allergy, the food allergen may trigger a severe immune response requiring immediate medical assistance that may be life-threatening. Therefore a person who has a food allergy must avoid their food triggers.

Prevalence

There is a 1 in 20 chance for children and 1 in 25 chance for adults that they will be allergic to some kind of food.

Natural History of Food Allergy in Children

Most children who are diagnosed with a food allergy will outgrow it. The following information is important for parents with a child who is diagnosed with a food allergy.

- Egg: Resolves in half of children by the age of 10 years; by the age of 16 years 80 percent will outgrow it.
- Milk: Resolves in 80 percent (4 out of 5) of children by the age of 5 years.
- Peanut: Less than 10 percent of children outgrow their peanut allergies.
- Wheat: Resolves in half of children by the age of 8 years; by the age of 12 years 65 percent will outgrow the allergy.
- Soy: 45 percent of children with a soy allergy resolved by the age of 6 years; by the age of 10 years 69 percent resolved from a soy allergy.

Symptoms

It is important to understand that symptoms will occur soon after eating the allergic food, as quickly as a few minutes and in some cases up to 4 hours. A person who has a food allergy may have any of the following symptoms;

Mild to moderate symptoms

- Hives or red, itchy skin
- Itchy nose
- Sneezing
- Itchy eyes
- Watery eyes
- Vomiting, stomach cramps or diarrhea
- Angioedema or swelling

Severe symptoms

- Hoarseness, throat tightness or a lump in the throat
- Wheezing, chest tightness or trouble breathing
- Tingling in the hands, feet, lips or scalp

If you experience any of the severe symptoms listed above, immediately call 911.

Diagnosis

If you suspect an allergic to foods a visit to our office is necessary. We will conduct a complete history and physical and if it is likely that you have a food allergy, we will then conduct a skin test. Food allergy skin testing is the most accurate test for identifying a food allergy. We can also conduct an oral food challenge test to better confirm or deny the food allergy if needed.

Treatment and Management

Avoidance of food allergens is the only treatment of a confirmed food allergy. Reading food labels is very important in managing in your allergies. Knowing what is in foods can minimize the occurrence of food allergy reactions.

If you have had a severe allergy reaction, you must carry an EpiPen with you at all times. For moderate reactions, antihistamines may help relieve symptoms.