

Adult Allergy Clinic, Dermatology Department, Churchill Hospital

# How to carry out a food challenge at home

Information for patients





## What is a food challenge?

A food challenge is a controlled and safe way of finding out whether you can now tolerate the food you have been avoiding.

It involves having a very tiny amount of the food, then building this amount up if there is no reaction.

## When is the best time to carry out the food challenge?

It is best to carry out the food challenge when you are feeling well. If you have a cold, flu, or your asthma is not under control, delay the food challenge to another time.

Carry out the challenge early in the day, so that you have plenty of time to work out whether you have had a reaction or not.

If your allergies are worse during the pollen season, you may find it helpful to wait until you are least likely to be affected by pollen allergies and you do not need to take antihistamines regularly.

Carry out the challenge when you are not taking antihistamines (preferably avoid taking them for a week before the challenge).

## Where should I do the food challenge?

Carry out the food challenge at home in a calm environment, preferably when there are other people around, in case you have a reaction.

## Symptoms checklist – what to do if you have symptoms during the food challenge:

### Mild to moderate symptoms

Tingling or itching sensation in your mouth

Feeling hot or very cold

Intense itching

Rapid development of nettle rash/wheals (hives)

Swelling, particularly of your face

Rising anxiety/feeling scared

Nausea and/or vomiting

Abdominal (stomach) pain

Pale skin

Mild wheeziness

### Treatment:

Take antihistamines

If you are wheezy, use your inhaler if you have one prescribed.

### Severe symptoms (possibly life-threatening)

Difficulty in breathing – either severe wheezing and/or hoarseness

Decreased level of consciousness, feeling faint, pale and floppy

Collapse

### Treatment:

Use your adrenaline autoinjector (e.g. Epipen, Emerade, JEXT) if you have been prescribed one.

**Call 999 and seek emergency help immediately.**

## How to carry out the food challenge

- Make sure you have followed the previous advice.
- Make sure the food you are testing has not been contaminated by anything else and use clean cutlery and crockery.
- Rub a crumb or drop of the food over your lower lip. Wait 10 minutes.
- If there is no sign of an allergic reaction after 10 minutes, put a small amount inside your lip and spit it out. Wait for 10 minutes.
- If there are no symptoms, take a small amount, chew it and spit it out or put couple of drops on your tongue and spit it out. Wait for 10 minutes.
- If there are no symptoms, increase the amounts for the next few stages from a crumb/drop, to a pea-sized amount, up to a teaspoonful. Wait 10 minutes between each step to see if there is any reaction.
- If at any stage an allergic reaction occurs, stop the challenge, take an antihistamine and treat the reaction appropriately. Continue to exclude that food item from your diet.
- In the unlikely event that you have a severe reaction, seek emergency help immediately.
- When you have recovered from any reaction, contact the Dermatology Department to let them know what you have reacted to. You may be offered a review appointment, if needed.
- If you complete the challenge and are symptom free, the food can be reintroduced into your diet in normal amounts.

## How to contact us

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