

Food challenges at home

Information for
parents and carers



Children's Allergy Clinic
Oxford Children's Hospital

What is a food challenge?

A food challenge is a controlled and safe way of finding out whether your child can now tolerate the food or drink they have been avoiding.

It involves them having a very tiny amount of the food or drink which previously might have caused a reaction, then building this amount up if there is no reaction.

Step 1:

Picking a time for the food challenge

Is your child well?

To do a food challenge your child needs to be well. If they have a cold, flu or any other illness they should not do the challenge until they are well.

Also, if your child is asthmatic or gets eczema, don't do the challenge until their symptoms are well controlled.

If you have any doubt about whether your child is well enough, postpone the food challenge for another time.

Where should we do the food challenge?

The food challenge should be done at home in a calm environment with parental or adult supervision.

Carry out the challenge early in the day, so that you have plenty of time to observe your child for any signs of a reaction.

What if my child takes antihistamines?

It's important that your child does not have any antihistamine medication in their body before doing a food challenge. The antihistamine will suppress any reaction they might have to the food or drink. This might give a false impression that they have outgrown their allergy.

Some antihistamines last longer than others:

- Don't start the challenge if your child has had Chlorphenamine (brands include Piriton), Promethazine (brands include Phenergan), or Alimemazine (brands include Vallergran) within the last 48 hours. Delay the challenge.
- Don't give your child longer acting antihistamines (e.g. cetirizine or loratadine) for 5 days before doing a food challenge.
- It's a good idea, if your child does use regular antihistamines, to do the food challenge at a time in the year when they are least affected by seasonal allergies (e.g. hayfever).

Know what to do if your child has an allergic reaction!

It is important to have antihistamines (and an adrenaline auto injector, if prescribed) available in case your child has a reaction at any stage of the challenge.

Before the food challenge, check the possible allergic symptoms (see below). If any of these symptoms develop, stop the food challenge and treat your child as directed.

Symptoms checklist:

Mild to moderate allergic symptoms	Severe allergic symptoms (known as anaphylaxis)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• tingling, itching or burning sensation in the mouth• feeling hot or very cold• intense itching• rapid development of nettle rash/wheals/hives (urticaria)• swelling, particularly of the face• rising anxiety or feeling scared• nausea and/or vomiting• abdominal (tummy) pain• looking flushed. <p>Treatment: Give antihistamines and monitor your child’s condition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• difficulty in breathing. Either noisy or unusual wheezy breathing, hoarseness, croupy or choking cough, not able to talk normally or drooling. Breathing difficulties are due to swelling in the airway.• decreased level of consciousness, faint, very pale, floppy, blue lips or unresponsive. This is due to a drop in blood pressure.• collapse. <p>Treatment: Call 999 and seek emergency help immediately. If prescribed, use your child’s adrenaline auto injector (e.g. EpiPen®, Jext® or Emerade®.)</p>

Step 2:

Carrying out a food challenge at home: The 1 day protocol

1. Make sure you have checked all the points under Step 1.
2. Prepare the food you are going to use for the challenge. It may be necessary to disguise it in a food your child is used to eating, such as a small piece of bread, or if it's liquid, in a small amount of drink.
3. Make sure it is not contaminated by anything else and use clean cutlery and crockery.
4. Touch the inside of your child's lower lip with a crumb or drop of the food/liquid. Wait 30 minutes.
5. If there are no signs of an allergic reaction after 30 minutes, continue by giving your child a crumb of the food to eat, (or if it's a liquid, a couple of drops). Wait another 30 minutes.
6. If there is no allergic reaction, increase the amounts for the next few stages, every 30 minutes, as follows:
 - a pea size
 - a teaspoon
 - a table spoon
 - an age appropriate portion.For liquids, give the equivalent amounts.
7. If at any stage an allergic reaction occurs, stop the challenge and treat as per the symptoms checklist on page 5. Continue to keep a close eye on your child as allergic symptoms can develop a few hours after eating. Continue to exclude that food from your child's diet.
8. Severe reactions at this stage will be extremely rare. In the unlikely event that your child has a severe reaction, seek emergency help immediately and use your child's auto adrenaline injector, if prescribed. Continue to exclude that food item from their diet. When your child has recovered, please contact the Children's Allergy Clinic (contact details at the back of this leaflet), for a reassessment of their allergy management.
9. If this challenge is symptom free, then include the food regularly in their diet, ideally 2 to 3 times per week.

Carrying out a food challenge at home: The 5 day protocol

1. Make sure you have checked all the points under Step 1.
2. Prepare the food you are going to use for the challenge. It may be necessary to disguise it in a food your child is used to eating, such as in yoghurt or bread.
3. Make sure it is not contaminated by anything else and use clean cutlery and crockery.

Day 1: Touch inside the child's lower lip with a crumb or drop of the food/liquid and wait for 30 minutes.

If there are no signs of an allergic reaction after 30 minutes give an eighth of a teaspoon and keep a close eye on your child for the next 2 hours

Day 2: Give quarter of a teaspoon of the challenge food, keeping an eye on you child for the next 2 hours

Day 3: Give half a teaspoon of the challenge food, keeping an eye on your child for the next 2 hours

Day 4: Give a whole teaspoon of the challenge food, keeping an eye on your child for the next 2 hours

Day 5: Give a full portion of the challenge food, keeping an eye on your child for the next 2 hours

4. If at any stage an allergic reaction occurs stop the challenge and treat as per the symptom checklist on page 5. Continue to exclude that food from their diet.
5. Severe reactions are rare. In the unlikely event that your child has a severe reaction seek emergency help immediately. When your child has recovered please contact the Children's Allergy Clinic for a reassessment of their allergy management, contact details at the back of this leaflet.
6. If this challenge is symptom free then include the food regularly in their diet, ideally 2 to 3 times per week.

How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

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Consultant Paediatrician with an interest in allergy.

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Children's Allergy Nurses

Email: childallergynurse@ouh.nhs.uk

Children's Allergy Secretaries

Horton General Hospital

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John Radcliffe Hospital

Telephone: **01865 221 652**

E-mail: allergysecretaryJR@ouh.nhs.uk

Further information

British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology (BSACI)

Telephone: **0207 501 3910**

Website: www.bsaci.org

The Anaphylaxis Campaign

Helpline: **01252 542 029**

Website: www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

Itchy Sneezzy Wheezy Project

For information on allergy, asthma, rhinitis and eczema

Website: www.itchysneezywheezy.co.uk

Allergy UK

Helpline: **01322 619 898**

Website: www.allergyuk.org

Asthma and Lung UK

Helpline: **0300 222 5800**

Website: www.asthmaandlung.org.uk

National Eczema Society

Website: www.eczema.org

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

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