

## WHAT IS FOOD ALLERGY?

A food allergy occurs when the immune system has an over-reaction to what are normally harmless substances, referred to as allergens.

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### COWS' MILK PROTEIN AND OTHER COMMON ALLERGENS

Foods most likely to cause allergies in infants and children are those containing cows' milk, wheat, hens' eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, sesame seeds, seafood and soy. The majority of food allergies are not severe and will disappear over time.

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF FOOD ALLERGY?

Sometimes an allergic reaction is delayed, but usually, the more immediate it is the more severe the infant's allergic sensitivity is. Allergy symptoms can affect many different parts of the body, and may include:

- **Skin reactions:** Swollen lips, rashes, eczema or hives.
- **Gastrointestinal upsets:** Vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pain or reflux.
- **Breathing and circulation problems:** This is serious, and is called "anaphylaxis". It can involve: difficult and/or noisy breathing, a hoarse voice, dizziness, or the child becoming floppy and limp. If any of these happen, **it's best to seek medical advice immediately.**
- **Other signs:** May include a runny or blocked nose, weight loss or infantile colic.

### WILL YOUR INFANT GROW OUT OF THEIR FOOD ALLERGY?

Children who are allergic to cows' milk, soy protein, wheat and eggs may grow out of their allergy as they get older. Unfortunately, allergies to peanuts, tree nuts and seafood generally remain throughout life.

### STEPS TO MANAGE FOOD ALLERGY PROBLEMS

#### 1. Know the foods that contain allergens and avoid them

If your infant has been confirmed by a doctor as having a food allergy, the most important thing you can do is avoid foods that trigger it. This means paying extra attention to the ingredients list of any foods or drinks you give your infant. Also by law the food label must declare the presence of any known food allergens. Often, allergens may be 'hidden' in food, so always check the labels.

#### Milk and milk products

For children with confirmed allergy to milk proteins, there are a whole lot of other dairy foods to avoid in addition to cows' milk itself – including cheese, butter, ghee, butter milk, cream, crème fraîche, milk powder, whey, casein, caseinate and any margarine with milk in it. Sometimes, goat milk will also need to be excluded.

Milk is a very common ingredient and it's very important to understand which items on a label indicate the presence of cows' milk protein – there are dozens of ingredients that may do. Avoid bakery items with a shine to them, as a milk and egg combination is often used to give this glazed appearance. Casein, a milk product, is often used in processed meats and seafoods, so always read these labels thoroughly too.

# STEPS TO MANAGE FOOD ALLERGY PROBLEMS

Breast feeding is best for young infants. However, if your child is part or fully formula fed, your doctor may recommend a specialty formula for infants with allergy to cows' milk protein. These products are available by prescription from your doctor, and should only be used with medical supervision.

## Wheat, Eggs or Soy

These common food proteins are found in many staple items, from bread, cereals and battered foods through to Asian basics like noodles and tofu. Again, be aware of food ingredients and foods your infant needs to avoid.

## Nuts

Extra care needs to be taken with children with tree nut or peanut allergies, especially if they are at risk of anaphylactic reaction. To ensure they are not accidentally exposed, always ask food providers if nuts have been used in their food, and also if there's any chance the food has been contaminated by utensils or preparation surfaces that have come into contact with nuts.

## 2. Recognise the early symptoms of an allergic reaction

Talk with your infant's doctor about signs to look for, these may include any of the symptoms mentioned overleaf.

## 3. Know what to do if it happens again

Your doctor can give advice on what to do if symptoms occur again, and how urgently medical advice needs to be sought. Be sure to share this information with teachers and carers who look after your infant.

## What about EpiPen® or Anapen®?

Where there's a chance of a serious anaphylactic reaction or restricted breathing, your doctor may provide you with an EpiPen® or an Anapen®. These are emergency devices that can inject adrenaline. If so, you need to ensure other people who care for your child also understand how to use them correctly.

## Seek support and information

You may wish to seek further support or information about caring for an infant with a food allergy. Those who understand can provide the best support. Professional groups like Baby Health Clinics, Tresillian, The Australian Breastfeeding Association and Plunket, New Zealand can help fulfil this role.



**BREAST MILK IS BEST FOR BABIES:** Professional advice should be followed before using an infant formula. Introducing partial bottle feeding could negatively affect breast feeding. Good maternal nutrition is important for breast feeding and reversing a decision not to breast feed may be difficult. Infant formula should be used as directed. Proper use of an infant formula is important to the health of the infant. Social and financial implications should be considered when selecting a method of feeding.