What is a contact reaction?

A contact reaction is when a food comes into contact with the skin and causes localised redness or rashes. Contact reactions commonly occur around the mouth, on the face & on the hands or wherever the food has come into contact with the skin.

Childrens skin can be sensitive and foods that are particularly acidic, salty or contain histamine can cause a contact reaction. Examples of foods that can commonly cause a contact reaction are aubergine, spinach, tomato, orange, lemon juice, kiwi & strawberry.

How do I know if it's a contact reaction (and not an allergy)?

Likely to be a contact reaction
(If the following apply)

- ✓ **Redness and/or rash is localised to the mouth, lips, chin and face where the food has touched.** The hands and wrists could also be affected if the child has been self-feeding or playing with the food
- ✓ **The area affected looks red and angry**
- ✓ **The redness or rash starts to subside by itself.** All food remnants should gently be wiped away from the hands and face
- ✓ **The child is generally unfazed by the reaction.** They may become unhappy if their food is taken away
- ✓ **Foods rich in histamine such as aubergine and spinach may make the child slightly itchy where the redness occurs**

Likely not to be a contact reaction
(If the following apply)

- ✗ **Redness and/or rash spreads or appears on other areas of the body** such as the legs, tummy and back
- ✗ **Hives appear on the body**
- ✗ Once the food has been removed and the food remnants wiped away, the **rash and redness does not resolve by itself or other symptoms such as a cough develop**
- ✗ **The child becomes distressed or upset by the reaction or become floppy and sleepy**
- ✗ **Widespread itching**

If I think my little one has had a contact reaction, what should I do?

- **Have a clean flannel or cloth** at the ready to wipe away any food immediately after eating.
- **There is no need to avoid the culprit food or remove it from your little one's diet**. You could apply a barrier cream such as Vaseline around the mouth or on the hands before eating and gently wipe away any foods after eating.
- **Keep an eye on the redness or rash to** ensure it is not spreading to other areas of the body.
- **Call your GP if you need reassurance that it is a contact reaction**. Send or take a photo of the affected area if you have one.

E: hello@nurserykitchen.co.uk
W: nurserykitchen.co.uk
T: 01245 808080

This factsheet was created with input from Dr Penny Barnard. Penny is a registered dietitian with over 25 years' experience working as an NHS paediatric dietitian. She specialises in paediatric food allergy and gastroenterology.

This information is evidenced based and correct at the time of writing (March 2024). It is not intended to replace advice given to a child by a healthcare professional. Any concerns about a child's health should be discussed with a GP in the first instance without delay.