Allergy question and answer factsheet for parents/carers

We asked Dr Penny Barnard, paediatric dietitian and allergy expert some frequently asked questions from parents and carers in relation to food allergy. Here's what she said....

Q Will avoiding allergens during pregnancy reduce the risk of my baby developing a food allergy?

A No. There is no evidence that avoiding food allergens during pregnancy will prevent food allergy. It is important to have a healthy, varied diet throughout pregnancy. Here is a link to help with this Have a healthy diet in pregnancy - NHS (www.nhs.uk)[1] Here is a parent's guide all about preventing food allergy Infant feeding and allergy prevention PARENTS FINAL (bsaci.org)[2]

Q My first baby had a peanut allergy. Does that mean any other babies I have will have a peanut allergy?

A No not necessarily. We don't inherit specific food allergies. We inherit the likelihood of developing allergic tendencies such as eczema, asthma, hay fever and food allergies.

Q My baby had eczema from 6 weeks of age. Will they have a food allergy?

A Eczema by 6 weeks of age is classified as early onset eczema. Babies who have early onset, significant or moderate to severe eczema are more likely to develop a food allergy.

Q At what age should I wean my baby?

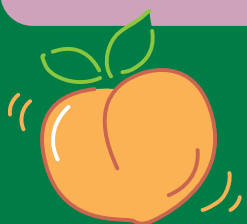
A In the UK it is recommended that weaning should begin at around 6 months or when your baby is developmentally ready. If your baby is at high risk of developing a food allergy, such as having early onset significant eczema or an existing food allergy then, if developmentally ready, weaning can begin earlier at around 4 months of age. Here is more information about introducing allergens early Infant feeding and allergy prevention PARENTS FINAL (bsaci.org)[2]

Q Do I have to introduce all food allergens by 1 year of age?

A No not necessarily. It is important that children are offered a varied diet and the common allergens are introduced by 12 months of age if possible. This would include milk, egg, peanut, fish, soya, gluten, sesame & the common tree nuts such as cashew & almond. It is important to communicate which allergens you have and have not already introduced with your childcare provider and to keep them updated as you introduce more allergens.

Q My child gets redness around the mouth every time they eat something with tomato in it. Do they need to avoid all tomato?

A This is likely to be a contact reaction. Children who have a contact reaction do not need to avoid the food unless it bothers them. A barrier cream could be applied around the mouth before eating the tomato & food remnants gently wiped away from around the mouth and hands as soon as the meal has been finished.



Q When I gave my child scrambled egg for the first time, they developed redness and hives around the mouth whilst eating it. My GP told me not to give any more scrambled egg but I could give egg baked in foods such as cakes. Is that correct?

A Yes. Children who have had a mild reaction to cooked egg can often tolerate baked egg in foods.

Q Will my baby grow out of their non-IgE mediated milk allergy.

A Yes. Most babies with a non-IgE mediated milk allergy will grow out of their allergy. Guidelines recommend babies reintroduce milk back into their diet by 12 months of age or after avoiding it in the diet for 6 months. Here is further information to help with this The Milk Allergy in Primary Care (MAP) Guideline 2019 | The GP Infant Feeding Network (UK) (gpifn.org.uk)[3]

Q My child has a severe allergy to cashew nuts. Should their nursery have a copy of his allergy action plan?

A Yes, every child with an IgE mediated (immediate) food allergy should have an allergy action plan. It is important that all childcare providers have a copy so they know exactly which allergens your child should be avoiding and what to do in an emergency. The allergy action plan will state what allergens need to be avoided and medication prescribed. Here is a link to the allergy action plan. This can be given to your allergy doctor to complete. Paediatric Allergy Action Plans - BSACI[4]

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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.

[1] https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/have-a-healthy-diet/
[2] https://www.bsaci.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/pdf_Infant-feeding-and-allergy-prevention-PARENTS-FINAL-booklet.pdf
[3] https://gpifn.org.uk/imap/
[4] https://www.bsaci.org/professional-resources/resources/paediatric-allergy-action-plans/