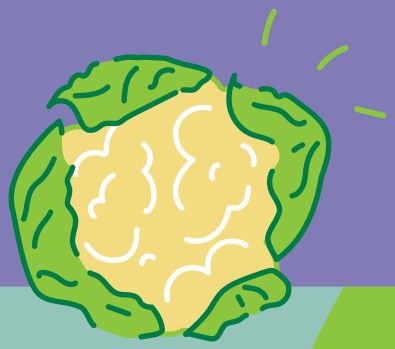
What's the difference between immediate and delayed food allergies?

The following tables summarise the similarities and differences in the signs and symptoms of IgE (immediate) and non-IgE (delayed) mediated food allergy.

CHARACTERISTICS	
IgE mediated (immediate) food allergy	**Non-IgE mediated (delayed) food allergy**
Symptoms appear less than 2 hours after eating a food, typically within 30 minutes	Symptoms appear more than 2 hours after eating a food
Symptoms can be severe and life threatening	Symptoms are generally mild and not life threatening
Allergy tests can be used to make a diagnosis	Cannot be diagnosed with allergy tests
Symptoms can be treated with antihistamine and severe symptoms with adrenalin	Symptoms generally cannot be relieved with antihistamine
An emergency allergy action plan should be available to every patient	An emergency allergy action plan is generally not required
Reactions can happen with small or large amounts of food	Reactions can happen with small or large amounts of food

SYMPTOMS		
	IgE mediated (immediate) food allergy	**Non-IgE mediated (delayed) food allergy**
SKIN	Hives (urticaria) Redness (flushing) Itchiness Swelling around the lips, face & eyes (angio-oedema) Eczema flare	Itchiness Atopic eczema
GUT	Swelling of the tongue & throat Vomiting Diarrhoea Abdominal pain Nausea	Vomiting Diarrhoea Abdominal pain/discomfort Colic Constipation Reflux Perianal redness Blood and or mucus in the stools Poor weight gain in combination with another gut symptom
AIRWAYS	Wheeze Persistent cough Difficulty breathing Voice change Difficulty swallowing Anaphylaxis	



What to do if you suspect your child has a food allergy

It is important that children with food allergies have a firm diagnosis so that their allergies can be monitored and treated in the correct way.

It may be helpful to keep a record of the foods you have recently offered, symptoms experienced (what and when) – include pictures where appropriate. This can be useful to discuss with your GP or healthcare professional. For suspected allergies a referral to an allergy specialist or paediatric dietitian for personalised guided support and testing is recommended. It is important not to self-diagnose a food allergy. If foods are avoided unnecessarily it can lead to nutritional deficiencies and poor growth.

If you suspect your child has had an allergic reaction to food it is best to avoid the culprit food and speak to your GP for further advice.

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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.