How to lower the chance of your baby getting a food allergy

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

What is an allergy?

An allergy is when the body reacts to something normally harmless like food, pollen, pets or others. This may cause certain symptoms. The substances that cause these symptoms are called allergens.

How can I lower the chance of my baby getting a food allergy?

Giving common food allergens early in the first year of life has been shown to lower the chance of your baby getting a food allergy.

When is my baby ready to start eating food allergens?

Babies start to be ready to eat solids around 4 to 6 months of age. Signs they are ready include:

- Sitting without support
- Good head and neck control
- Opening the mouth for a spoon

How do I start giving my baby solid foods?

First, start with iron and zinc rich foods such as cereals or pureed meats. Then introduce fruits and vegetables. Your doctor can give you a handout about feeding solids to your baby.

After your baby does OK with these foods, start giving the most common foods that cause food allergies. These are called food allergens.

What are the most common food allergens?

The most common food allergens are:

- Milk
- Egg
- Wheat
- Soy
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Sesame
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts such as:
  - Almonds
  - Cashews
  - Pistachios
  - Walnuts
  - Pecans
  - Hazelnuts

What if my baby is at high risk for peanut allergy?

Your baby may be at high risk for peanut allergy if they have very bad eczema, egg allergy or both. Talk with the doctor **before** giving your baby peanut-containing foods.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

How do I start giving food allergens?

Introduce 1 new food at a time. First, give a small taste and wait 10 minutes. If there are no signs of an allergic reaction, you may give the rest of it at your baby's usual eating speed.

At each sitting:

- Pick a time when your baby is well, not sick.
- Plan to pay close attention to your baby for at least 2 hours to watch for an allergic reaction.
- Boil, puree or mix with foods your baby is already eating.
- Be sure to cook egg whites all the way before giving them to your baby.
- If you are giving peanut-containing food – to prepare a full portion, you can use one of the recipes from FARE (Food Allergy Research & Education) at: babysfirst.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/iReach_CaregiverContract-020421-v03.pdf
- If you are giving tree nuts – you can give a nut butter such as Trader Joe's Mixed Nut Butter.
- If you are giving sesame – you can give hummus or tahini paste.

What are symptoms of allergic reaction?

Mild symptoms of a reaction are:

- A new rash
- A few hives around the face

Severe symptoms can be one or more of these:

- Face, lip or tongue swelling
- Vomiting (throws up)
- Any trouble breathing, wheezing or cough
- Change in skin color (pale or blue)
- Sudden tiredness or going limp

If you see any of these or other symptoms, or you have any concerns about your baby's response, seek medical attention or call 911 **right away**.

Where can I learn more?

For more details, you may visit babysfirst.org.

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This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.