

# Allergy Information: Food Challenges

## What is an allergy food challenge?

A food challenge involves giving small amounts of a food regularly that you/your child may be allergic to, while being closely observed.

## Why is a food challenge needed?

This is the best test of whether someone is or is not allergic to a particular food. Sometimes skin prick tests or blood tests do not give us a clear answer so a food challenge is needed. They are sometimes used to confirm if someone has grown out of their allergy.

## Important information before a food challenge

**It is very important that anti-histamines are stopped for at least three days before the food challenge as this may mask the reaction.**

If you have needed to use them for any reason in that time please contact the **Allergy Nurse: 01225 824519.**

Any other medication such as asthma treatments (including Montelukast) should be continued as usual.

**The food challenge will not be performed when someone is unwell** (diarrhoea, vomiting, wheeze or temperature). Please let us know as soon as possible if you are unable to attend the appointment and we will rearrange the challenge.

## Antihistamines to stop before a food challenge

- Certirizine (*Zirtek*<sup>®</sup>, *Piriteze*<sup>®</sup>, Benadryl<sup>®</sup>)
- Chlorphenamine (*Pirition*<sup>®</sup>)
- Loratidine (*Clarityn*<sup>®</sup>)

- Desloratidine (*Neoclarityn*<sup>®</sup>)
- Fexofenadine (*Telfast*<sup>®</sup>)
- Levocetirizine (*Xyzal*<sup>®</sup>)
- Mizolastine (*Mizollen*<sup>®</sup>)

## Things to bring with you

Although there are some activities available it is a good idea to bring some games, a laptop or books along, particularly for older children. We also suggest bringing a book or magazine for whoever is accompanying the patient as it can get a bit boring!

**Please bring your antihistamines and Epipen<sup>®</sup> with you, and any asthma reliever (blue) inhalers** if you have them. We do have supplies of these in the department as well if they are needed.

You can bring a small amount of food which you know does not cause any problems to have during or at the end of the challenge if needed. Drinking water is available in the department but you may want to bring any other cold drinks. Hot drinks are not allowed in the department for safety reasons.

We often ask you to bring a small quantity of the food to be tested with you e.g. a small packet of nuts, sesame snaps, biscuits, fairy cake etc. We will have discussed what food to bring prior to your appointment. Call the allergy nurse if you are unsure **01225 824519**

## What happens during a food challenge?

Please come to **Children's Outpatients (Dept B11)**

Please expect to stay **all morning** in the department for the challenge. If you/your child have a reaction they may need to be observed for longer.

At the start of the challenge blood pressure, pulse rate, weight and height will be monitored and repeated after that as required. The allergy nurse will meet you to ensure your child is well, and take the food that you have brought with you to divide into portions.

If you are worried at any time during the challenge you can speak to one of the doctors or a nurse. The challenge can stop at any time if there are concerns. Because the challenge is done slowly it is very rare for any severe reactions to occur.



## How is the food given?

We start with a very small amount of the food to be challenged and gradually increase the size of the portion every 15 minutes throughout the morning. The allergy nurse will check your child is tolerating the food at regular intervals throughout the challenge.

Sometimes the food to be challenged may be given as an ingredient in another food e.g. egg in a fairy cake. The challenge continues until a sufficient amount of food has been consumed for us to be happy there will not be any reaction.

Observation in the department continues for a period of an hour and then we will usually allow you to go to the café or another part of the hospital for 30 minutes before going home.

## What will happen at the end of the challenge?

### **If the challenge is negative**

If there are no symptoms during the food challenge, then it is no longer necessary to exclude the particular food from the diet. We advise not having any more of the test food on the day of the challenge but it can be reintroduced the following day, and gradually introduced into the day to day diet. We will write to you and your GP and let them know your child no longer is allergic to that food.

### **If the challenge is positive**

If allergic symptoms develop while trying the food, the challenge will be stopped and you will be reviewed by a doctor or nurse. Treatment with the appropriate medications will be given, and if needed you will be closely monitored by nursing and medical staff. Before you go home the doctor will ensure that it is safe to leave.

In case of a positive challenge, we will write to your GP, with a copy to you/ your family and school nurse where appropriate. We will usually book a follow up appointment with your consultant at the allergy unit. Where necessary the dietitian will also give advice.

## What are the possible disadvantage and risks of the challenge?

There is the risk of developing an allergic reaction during the food challenge. This will be dealt with immediately by the medical team who will be present in the department at all times.

## For advice and support with your child's food challenge

Contact the allergy admin team: 01225 824393/82

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Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG  
01225 428331 [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email [ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656.