

Food Challenge Tests

Allergy Clinic

The allergy team have suggested that a food challenge may be helpful for you or your child. This leaflet gives more information to help you to decide if you wish to go ahead with this.

There is a waiting list for food challenges. The allergy nurses will get in contact again once we have appointment dates free. Before finalising a date, we will give you the opportunity to ask any further questions.

If you have any questions please contact the paediatric allergy team:

E-mail: ruh-tr.childrensallergyclinic@nhs.net or telephone 01225 824519 / 824393

Please include your child's name and date of birth (and the date of the challenge, if known)

Please keep this leaflet to remind yourself of the details nearer the date of the challenge.

What is an allergy food challenge test and why is it necessary?

A food challenge test is the best way to show if someone is allergic, or not, to a particular food. Sometimes skin prick tests or blood tests do not give us a clear answer, so a food challenge is needed. A challenge is also sometimes used to confirm if someone has outgrown their allergy.

The challenge involves eating increasing amounts of a food whilst being closely observed by clinical staff. It starts with a very tiny amount of food, followed by increasing food 'doses' every 15-30 minutes, until a suitable total amount has been consumed. The test is stopped if any allergic reactions occur.

The challenge takes place over several hours. It is done at the hospital so that any reactions can be treated quickly and so the allergy nurses can assess whether any symptoms are definitely due to the food. Occasionally we are happy to allow home challenges once a clinic challenge has been successful for another allergen. This depends on test results and will be discussed at clinic.

We do not normally organise a challenge unless you are happy to introduce that food into the diet afterwards if the food is tolerated. It is important that the food is eaten fairly regularly otherwise there is a chance the allergy could return.

Important information before a food challenge

It is very important that antihistamines are stopped for at least three days before the food challenge as this may mask any reactions. 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 have needed to use antihistamines or if your child is unwell so we can rearrange the challenge and book someone else in the slot. Remember to include the child's full name and date of birth and date of the challenge.

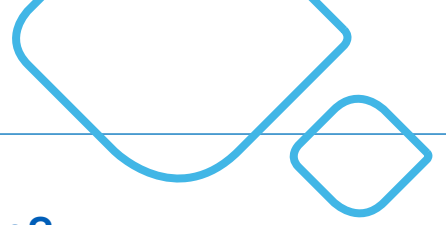
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Food for the challenge:

- **You will need to bring a small quantity of the food to be tested with you.** We will discuss exactly what food to bring prior to your appointment e.g. a small packet of nuts, nut butter, sesame snaps, biscuits, fairy cake etc. Sometimes we can send a specific recipe to use.
- If you suspect that something to help “hide” the taste of the test food will be needed you can also bring this e.g. ketchup, flavouring or another food such as yoghurt or crackers (it must be a food you know your child eats regularly and tolerates).

Other things to bring with you:

- **You must bring your child's antihistamines, plus, if prescribed, an adrenaline autoinjector e.g. Epipen[®], asthma reliever (blue) inhalers or other emergency medication.** The hospital has all medication, but you must have your own in case they are needed when you leave the department or for the journey home.
- Bring a small, packed lunch, with food you know does not cause any problems, to eat at the end of the challenge. 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.
- 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!
- **Due to the size of the room, we use for challenges, only 1 parent, and no other children can accompany the allergic child to their challenge.**



What happens on the day of the food challenge?

The allergy nurses run the food challenge tests in the children's outpatient department (Dept B11) or in a day area on the children's ward. Go to outpatients reception where staff will direct you.

Expect to stay **all morning** in the department for the challenge. If a reaction occurs you will need to stay longer for observation. A change of clothes/top can be useful to bring.

The allergy nurse will check you understand what will happen, ensure your child is well and will ask you to sign a consent form. Blood pressure, pulse rate, weight and height will be measured and repeated during the test if required. They will take the food you have provided and divide it into suitable portions.

The nurse will have a quick look at your child's skin so that we know what it looks like before any test food, in case any rashes or swelling occur. We may take a photo on a hospital camera, or ask you to take one on your phone, so that any changes e.g. skin swelling, can be documented. With permission, this photo may be uploaded to your child's medical record if they have a reaction. It will not be used for any other purpose and the original on the hospital camera will be destroyed.

The challenge starts with a very small amount of the food to be tested, with increasing in amounts given every 15-30 minutes. The number of doses will vary depending on your child's previous allergy history and test results. If you are worried at any time during the challenge let the nurses or other team members know.

What happens if there is an allergic reaction?

The challenge is monitored throughout by clinical staff and can be stopped at any time if there are concerns. Because the challenge is done slowly it is very rare for severe reactions to occur.

If allergic symptoms develop while trying the food, the challenge will be stopped, and you will be given the appropriate treatment and closely monitored by nursing and medical staff.

This does mean that the hospital stay is extended until you are well enough to go home.

Sometimes mild symptoms occur due to worry about eating a food previously avoided. In this instance this often eases as a challenge progresses and results in a successful challenge. We can take a short break and retry a dose if needed.

Sometimes children refuse to eat the food. We need parents to be as encouraging as possible and try to hide any anxiety to reduce the chances of that happening. Preparing a child prior to the challenge is really helpful and reduces the chances of refusal.

If all the food doses are not eaten, we cannot say for sure if a child is allergic, although we may have still gained some useful information.

What will happen at the end of the challenge?

After all the doses have been eaten observation continues for at least an hour. After that the nurse will advise you how much longer you need to stay on the hospital site before going home.

We will give you written information to take home, and we will send a letter to you and your GP to update your medical records with the outcome of the challenge.

We will update any action plans accordingly and discuss a plan going forward.

If the challenge is successful:

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 after 48 hours it can be gradually introduced into the day-to-day diet.

If the challenge is unsuccessful:

If the challenge has been stopped early due to an allergic reaction or other reasons, the allergy team will give you advice about what to do next in terms of treatments, foods to avoid and follow-up tests or appointments.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. If you have any questions or feedback, please contact the allergy team who will be more than happy to deal with any questions.

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If you would like this leaflet in email form, large print, braille or another language, please contact the Patient Support and Complaints team on 01225 825656.

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