

Nut allergy

Information and advice for parents and carers

Paediatric Nutrition & Dietetics

What is a nut allergy?

A nut allergy is when the body reacts abnormally to the proteins in nuts. 1 – 2 in every 100 children have a nut allergy.

The most common nut allergy is to peanut (also known as groundnut, earth nut or monkey nut), followed by cashew nut and brazil nut. Officially peanut is not actually a nut, it belongs to the legume family, which includes lentils, beans and peas. However, in everyday life it is classed as a common nut along with tree nuts. Common tree nuts include cashew, brazil, almond, hazelnut, walnut, macadamia, pecan, pistachio.

In most children this is an allergy for life. However, if common sense precautions are taken, allergic reactions are uncommon and the child can enjoy a normal, happy (though nut free) life.

How is nut allergy diagnosed?

To confirm your child has a nut allergy, their doctor/nurse may perform a skin prick test or blood tests (sIgE). For the skin prick test, a small amount of nut extract in a solution will be applied on your child's arm and their skin will be pricked, they may feel a slight scratch.

It is important to know that the size of the reaction on a skin prick test or the sIgE level of a blood test shows how likely a reaction is to happen if your child is exposed to nut, it does not predict the severity of the reaction.

Even if tests have found that your child is fine with some nuts but not with others it may be easier to avoid all nuts in order to prevent confusion for your child and their carers.

What causes the allergy?

It is still uncertain why people develop food allergies. An allergic reaction to food is caused when the body's immune system treats harmless proteins found in food as a threat to the body by mistake. It then releases chemicals such as histamine to prevent this threat, which it treats as an infection. These chemicals can cause a variety of symptoms of allergy.

If your child has a nut allergy it is important they avoid the nut(s) and also foods that contain the nut(s).

What are the symptoms of an allergic reaction?

Symptoms of a mild reaction

Most children only have a mild to moderate reaction when exposed to nut(s). The following symptoms may look or feel serious but fall in the mild category:

- Urticaria (blotch red rash, like nettle rash)
- Funny feeling/taste in the mouth

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- Lip, eye or facial swelling
- Vomiting

Symptoms of a severe reaction

A severe allergic reaction is known as anaphylaxis. This is a very rare reaction that only the most sensitive of people are at risk of. Anaphylaxis symptoms include:

- Difficulty in breathing or asthma attack
- Throat tightening
- Tongue swelling
- Drowsiness

How is an allergic reaction treated?

If your child has eaten food which contains nut, you should do one of the following:

Mild reaction

Give them an antihistamine tablet such as chlorphenamine (Piriton) or loratidine (Clarityn).

Severe reaction

Children considered at high risk of anaphylaxis are prescribed an Epipen to carry with them at all times as part of an overall care plan. This is an adrenaline auto-injector (similar to an injection). If your child is given an Epipen, we will show you how to use it.

If your child has an anaphylactic reaction, you must treat it promptly with an Epipen and then dial '999'. If you do not have an Epipen then dial 999 straight away. Tell them that your child is having an allergic reaction and the symptoms.

You will be given more detailed, written information about treating an allergic attack at your child's allergy clinic appointment.

Foods that are likely to contain nuts include:

The following foods may contain nuts:

- Asian and Oriental foods e.g. tikka, korma curry and satay sauce
- Ice cream
- Breakfast cereals
- Bread (seeded/nut versions)
- Cereal bars
- Cakes
- Biscuits

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- Chocolate/ sweets
- Puddings

Please note this is not a complete list.

From an early age try to teach your child to always ask an adult before trying a new food.

Advice when:

Food shopping

Many supermarkets and health food stores have a 'Free from' section which can be useful for finding nut-free products.

Always read food labels for nut even on foods eaten regularly. This is particularly important if the food item has had a change to the recipe. Your dietitian can help you with this if you are unsure how to read food labels.

Eating out

Always let the staff in restaurants and takeaways know that your child has a nut allergy and if they cannot reassure you that the food is nut free then choose an alternative dish or eat elsewhere.

Cross contamination

Many foods are labelled as 'may contain traces of nuts' or 'made in a factory that handles nuts'. This means that the food does not contain nut as an ingredient but that there is a risk of contamination of the food with a nut. We advise your child avoids these foods.

To reduce the risk of cross contamination you can:

- Ensure that your house is a nut free zone.
- Ensure that relatives and carers of your child who have eaten or handled nuts wash their hands thoroughly and avoid kissing the child.
- Wash utensils and surfaces carefully when nuts have been in contact with them.
- Never remove nuts from a food item and then allow your child to eat the rest, for example, taking the nuts off an ice cream or out of Bombay Mix.

Informing your child's school and/or carers

Please ensure all carers are aware of your child's allergy and the treatment plan. Schools and day care nurseries will need to draw up a care plan for your child and staff will need to be trained in recognition and treatment of an allergic reaction. They will need to have antihistamines and/or an EpiPen kept at the school or nursery.

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Allergy notification bracelet/chain

You may wish to consider purchasing a Medicalert bracelet or chain for your child which will carry information about his/her allergy. You can do this by contacting:

Medicalert

Freephone: 0800 581420

Email: info@medicalert.org.uk

Website: www.medicalert.org.uk

Medi-Tag

Tel: 0121 200 1616

Website: www.medi-tag.co.uk

Contact Details

Your doctor may or may offer a further clinic appointment depending on the assessment of your child. If your child has a serious reaction or develops asthma you should arrange for them to be referred to the allergy clinic for a review of their treatment plan.

Dietitian: _____

Tel: _____

Further information

For more information about allergies and the support available:

Allergy UK

www.allergyuk.org

Helpline: 01322 619 898

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

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Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- EBM Guidelines, 'Food allergy and hypersensitivity in children', 2010
- Host, A et al, 'Dietary prevention of allergic diseases in infants and small children.' Paediatric Allergy Immunology, February 2008
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 'Food allergy in children and young people' (CG116) , February 2011
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 'Anaphylaxis: assessment to confirm an anaphylactic episode and the decision to refer after emergency treatment for a suspected anaphylactic episode' (CG134), December 2011

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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