



## **Allergies in Children: Information for Parents**

from [www.kidsgrowth.com](http://www.kidsgrowth.com)

You're allergic to shellfish and your wife gets the sniffles from pollen, so now the question is will your children also have allergies? There is a very good chance they will.

A family history of allergies is the single most important factor that predisposes a person to develop allergic disease. If one parent has allergic disease, the estimated risk of the child to develop allergies is 48%; the child's risk grows to 70% if both parents have allergies.

This genetic tendency, called "atopy," occurs when allergic individuals' immune systems essentially go into overdrive when they come into contact with an allergen.

An allergen refers to any substance such as pollen, mold or animal dander that can trigger an allergic response.

When this immune response is mounted, the body produces a certain type of antibody in the blood, called IgE. The overproduction of IgE antibodies predisposes "atopic" individuals to develop allergic diseases such as allergic rhinitis and asthma.

Although allergies and asthma cannot be uniformly prevented, recent information suggests that there are steps a family - especially one with a history of allergic disease - should take to delay or lessen the likelihood of their children developing allergies.

Scientists have combed the human genome and our environment for the keys to prevent, or eventually short circuit, allergic disease and asthma from developing.

Some research studies have found breast feeding, from birth to age 1, can help protect a child from potentially developing allergies or asthma.

Breast feeding may help protect a child's immune system from overreacting to potential allergy triggers until it is more fully developed.

Although food avoidance is suggested when breast feeding, the same does not hold true during pregnancy.

Investigations into the role of food allergens ingested during pregnancy have found that avoiding allergens during pregnancy does not impact whether an infant later developed allergies.

Studies also have yet to confirm if ingested allergens (in small quantities and of small molecular size) can prime a child for allergic disease. Therefore, maternal breast feeding diets that exclude certain foods are not recommended at this time.

Mothers -- during both pregnancy and while nursing -- who come from highly allergic families during both pregnancy and while nursing. Studies do suggest that peanut ingestion during these times increases the baby's chance of developing peanut allergy. Since peanut allergy is generally a lifelong condition and can be very serious, some health professionals believe avoidance precautions appear warranted in such situations.

Besides diet, a child's environment early in life can impact the likelihood of developing allergies and asthma.

Several studies have suggested that exposure to high concentrations of indoor allergens is associated with higher rates of asthma in children or an earlier age of disease onset. One study found the relative risk of asthma at age 11 to be 4.8 times greater if the child was exposed to high levels of dust mites in infancy.

These children were also found to have asthma symptoms much earlier in life when exposed to the mite allergens.

Other studies have found cockroach allergen, commonly found in inner city environments, to relate to the frequency of wheezing in children in their first year of life.

Other suggestions to help reduce the occurrence of allergy and asthma in children are:

- Delay solid foods until six months of age - then follow a suggested regiment for introducing new foods
- Limit exposure to indoor pets early in life
- Reduce and eliminate maternal smoking during and after pregnancy
- Avoid day care for very young children

Although it is not possible to completely prevent allergies and asthma in young children with the knowledge we currently have, genetic and cellular engineering promise hope for such absolute prevention in the future.

In the meantime, parents with allergies or asthma can make the recommended environmental changes and use the preventative strategies discussed to help reduce or delay the occurrence of allergies and asthma in their children.