



## **Coping with your Child's Food Allergies**

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"Managing food allergies is a process, not an event," writes the author of an article published in the June 6, 2003, issue of *Pediatrics*. This article discusses the psychosocial impact of food allergies in children and adolescents and offers strategies for coping with allergies in a variety of settings and situations. The author points out that, although food allergies can be serious and even fatal, thousands of children with food allergies participate in sports, go to camp, attend sleepovers, and do not allow their food allergies to unnecessarily restrict their activities.

The article offers the following strategies for handling food allergies:

- \* **Label reading.** The safest, most accurate, and -- in the long run -- most efficient method of avoiding an allergic reaction is to read every food label. The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network provides wallet-sized cards that explain how to identify common food allergens. It is not advisable to ignore or discount advisory or "may contain" statements in food labels.

- \* **Cooking.** Avoidance of allergens requires families to adapt recipes and make substitutions. Some families choose to eliminate the allergen from the home, while others allow the allergen into the home and use the opportunity to teach the child to avoid certain foods. Families should be aware that some individuals may react from inhaling cooking fumes during the frying or steaming of foods to which they are allergic.

- \* **Schools.** The key to successfully managing food allergies in schools is to train school staff to minimize risks, recognize symptoms, and act quickly once an allergic reaction occurs. Under federal law, schools cannot exclude children with food allergies from participating in school functions because of their food allergies.

- \* **Restaurants.** Avoiding Asian and Mexican restaurants (which tend to use nuts), buffets, ice cream shops, and bakeries can minimize the likelihood of the occurrence of an allergic reaction. Once a restaurant has been selected, parents should ask to speak to the manager and should explain their child's food allergies.

- \* **Adolescents.** Studies have shown that adolescents with food allergies are at high risk for a severe or fatal allergic reaction. Extra efforts should be made to educate adolescents and their friends about avoiding risks and taking control in the case of a reaction.

The author concludes that "patients should always be prepared to handle an allergic emergency; they must be taught that proper management of food allergies requires constant education."

*Munoz-Furlong, A. 2003. Daily coping strategies for patients and their families. Pediatrics 3(6):1654-1661*