

Common Infant and Childhood Problems

(Birth – 5 years)

Food Allergies

* What are food allergies?

A food allergy is when the body's immune system reacts negatively to the proteins in foods. The reaction occurs right after eating the food. These reactions can range from mild to severe.



* How do I know if my child has a food allergy? Signs your child may have:

- Hives (red spots), itchy skin rashes, or swelling
- Sneezing, congestion, wheezing, or tight throat
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Pale skin, light-headedness, or drop in heart rate

If your child is experiencing several signs listed above or is having trouble breathing, the reaction could be a severe, life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis. **Call 911 if your child has a severe reaction.**

* What are the most common foods that cause allergies?

- Dairy, such as cow's milk, cheese, cream, yogurt, butter, sour cream, ice cream, and cottage cheese
- Eggs
- Wheat
- Soy
- Peanuts
- Nuts from trees, such as pecans, walnuts, and pistachios
- Fish, such as tuna, salmon, and cod
- Shellfish, such as shrimp and lobster

Although these are the most common food allergens, any food can cause a reaction.



* How can I help prevent food allergies?

- Breastfeed exclusively (feed only breastmilk) for about the first 6 months of life.
- Do not give foods other than breastmilk or formula before your baby is 4 to 6 months old.
- Give one new food at a time. Wait 5 to 7 days to watch for signs of allergies before giving another new food. If your baby has signs of a food allergy, wait a few months before giving that food again. Unless your doctor tells you otherwise:
- You do not need to cut out common food allergens from your diet while pregnant or lactating.

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How can I help prevent food allergies?

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- Feeding a common food allergen to your baby after 6 months of age is OK, and it does not increase the chance of your baby developing a food allergy.



* If your child is showing signs of a possible food allergy:

- Take your child to the doctor to have allergy tests done.
- Read the entire food label to look for common food allergens, and talk to a dietitian for help.
- Most children outgrow food allergies.
- Your child may need a vitamin/mineral supplement.

* If you are breastfeeding and your child is showing signs of possible food allergies:

- Your baby may be having an allergic reaction to something you are eating.
- Stop eating the common food allergens listed above, starting with all dairy foods.
- If your child is still having signs of allergies after two weeks of eating no dairy foods, stop eating eggs next. Keep going down the list of common foods that cause allergies until your baby's signs of allergy go away.

* The following are not a food allergy:

- Lactose intolerance, or sensitivity to the Lactose sugar in dairy foods, is not the same as a food allergy. Infants and children with lactose intolerance have bloating, gas, diarrhea, and stomach aches after drinking or eating milk products.
- Vomiting, diarrhea, and upset stomach can also be due to food poisoning or certain diseases such as Celiac disease.



For more information on food allergies, visit The Food Allergy and Anaphalaxis Network www.foodallergy.org or the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America www.aafa.org.

For more information on food allergies and breastfeeding, visit www.kellymom.com.