

Food Allergy Myth Busters

MYTH #1 My child just has a mild food allergy, so we don't always carry epinephrine.

BUSTED It's possible to have mild allergic reactions, but it's impossible to predict how severe a reaction might be in the future. Allergy tests can't predict the severity of reactions, either. For this reason, you should carry your child's epinephrine auto-injector (EpiPen® or Twinject®) at all times.

MYTH #2 We know my child has a food allergy because he had a positive blood or skin test.

BUSTED About half of positive test results are false positives—the person is not actually allergic to that food. A board-certified allergist can help you determine which positive tests indicate a genuine allergy; history of past reactions (or lack thereof) is significant. Also, many children outgrow their food allergies, so periodic re-testing is important.

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Medical content reviewed by
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MYTH #3 If she doesn't eat it, she can't have an allergic reaction to it.

BUSTED Food proteins can enter the bloodstream through mucous membranes like the eyes or nose. Rarely, they can be inhaled (for instance, if peanuts are being shelled nearby.) So, while it's less common, a person can react to foods even if she doesn't eat it.

MYTH #4 A little taste can't hurt—and it might help!

BUSTED The immune system can trigger an all-out attack even to a tiny amount of allergen. People have had life-threatening reactions to "safe" foods that were served with the same spatula as an allergen-containing food. While researchers are looking into ways to desensitize allergic people through tiny doses of their allergens, this is something that should be tried only under close medical supervision—never at home.

MYTH #5 We know a particular brand of food is safe because my child has eaten it before.

BUSTED The FDA currently requires that food labels identify the top 8 allergens (milk, soy, egg, wheat, fish, shellfish, peanuts, and tree nuts) in plain English. It does not require that companies label for possible cross-contamination. Some companies do this voluntarily, but there are no official or standard rules for these warnings. Foods that were previously safe may be contaminated with varying amounts of allergen in the future, depending on when or where a particular batch was produced in relation to the facility's other products.

MYTH #6 A food allergy is any type of adverse reaction to a food.

BUSTED Foods can trigger symptoms for all sorts of reasons, including other ingredients in the food, toxins, high concentrations of histamine, bacteria, and viruses, to name a few. Don't assume that just because a certain food gives you problems that you're allergic to that food.

San Diego Food Allergy Support Group™

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