



Introducing solids

Food allergies

Remember...

- Reactions to foods can range from mild to severe.
- Reactions can happen immediately after eating, or hours or days later.
- All factors should be looked at to find out what has caused the reaction.
- Seek advice before you change your child's diet.
- A family history of a certain allergy increases the child's chances of developing it.
- Don't introduce wheat, fish and eggs until your baby is eight months, or if you have a family history of allergy to these foods, wait until after 12 months.
- Foods likely to cause a reaction – like cow's milk, nuts and seeds, shellfish, chocolate, honey, tomato and berries – should only be introduced after 12 months.

What is an allergy?

It is an adverse reaction by the body to a foreign material. Antibodies are produced and these cause the allergic reaction.

What is food intolerance?

This involves an adverse reaction to food, but it doesn't involve the production of antibodies.

What is food aversion?

An avoidance of foods based on psychological factors (eg. in pregnancy).

Common symptoms of allergies

- Skin rash
- Excessive mucus
- Abdominal cramps
- Diarrhoea
- Swelling
- Vomiting
- Eczema
- Failure to thrive
- Reactions range in effect from mild rash to anaphylaxis.

Reactions can occur immediately (within two minutes to two hours of eating) or may be delayed (may take hours or days after eating).

Allergies can be caused by factors other than food as well

- It is difficult to identify problem foods when there are other factors that could be causing the responses. For example, allergies and intolerances are more common in young children as their immune system is not yet fully developed. Most will grow out of these responses.
- If food is found to be the problem, a decision must be made as to whether dietary restriction is needed.
- Restricting dietary intake places the entire family under great strain – nutritional, social and psychological – and other treatments may be more realistic.
- Parents need to be realistic and seek advice before changing their child's diet.

Some foods will cause only mild reactions. In these instances, it is advisable to wait a month and then to retry. If there is a family history of allergy and/or food intolerance, there will be an increased chance of the child developing it. The likelihood of a child developing an allergy/food intolerance is doubled if both parents suffer from allergies.

It is important to get specialist help

You don't want to unnecessarily restrict a child's diet, especially during periods of vital growth and repair.

Sensible precautions

- It is best to avoid very high allergen foods until after 12 months – this is especially true for babies with strong family history of allergy. These foods include peanut and other nuts and seeds, cows milk, soy milk, egg, shellfish, chocolate, honey, tomato, berries, citrus fruit, kiwi fruit and mango.
- Do not introduce wheat until eight months (12 months if family history of allergy).
- Do not introduce fish until eight months (12 months if family history of allergy).
- Do not introduce egg yolk until eight months (12 months if family history of allergy).

Acknowledgements

This fact sheet is consistent with current Infant Feeding Guidelines and Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia, as produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

It is also based on information drawn heavily from:

- Infant and Toddler Feeding Guide, Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Royal Children's Hospital and Health Service District, 2004.
- Breastfeeding: A Simple Guide to Help You Establish Breastfeeding, Community Child Health Service, Royal Children's Hospital and Health Service District, 2004.
- Growing Strong: Feeding You and Your Baby, Public Health Services, Queensland Health, 2003.
- Optimal Infant Nutrition: Evidence Based Guidelines 2003-2008, Queensland Health, 2003.

This fact sheet is also the result of input and effort from many health professionals in Queensland. Their help with the content is greatly appreciated.

To access the full set of fact sheets, go to <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/child&youth/factsheets>.

