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FOOD ALLERGY BASICS FOR THE NEWLY DIAGNOSED

WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGY?

- The immune system (which usually fights germs) is mistakenly “attacking” food proteins
 - Food allergy can be severe/life-threatening (“anaphylaxis”)
 - Food “intolerance” is different from food allergy
 - Lactose intolerance, a problem with digesting the sugar in milk, is not life-threatening
- It is more likely to happen if close relatives or your child has other allergies (like asthma, eczema and hay fever)

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF FOOD ALLERGY?

- Sometimes there are sudden symptoms (within minutes to 1-2 hours) that can include:

Skin: itchy rashes, hives (welts), swelling of lips

Airway: itchy mouth, tight throat, coughing, trouble breathing, asthma (wheezing)

Gut/Stomach: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

Other: poor blood circulation causing paleness, fainting, weak pulses

- Sometimes food allergy is the cause of daily problems such as rashes (atopic dermatitis, eczema) or gut symptoms (pain, vomiting, poor growth)

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

- Many symptoms can look like a food allergy but may be caused by other types of allergies (for example, pollens, animal dander) or an illness that is not a food allergy (like a viral infection)
 - It is important to discuss your child’s symptoms with your doctor
- Your doctor evaluates the medical history and may perform allergy tests (skin scratch test or blood tests for allergy)
- Sometimes the history and simple tests are not enough to identify a food allergy and trials of food removal or doctor-supervised feedings are needed



HOW IS IT TREATED?

- AVOIDANCE
 - Once diagnosed, the main treatment is to avoid the food
 - For some people, small amounts of food can trigger a reaction
- EDUCATION
 - Learn about label reading, acquiring a safe restaurant meal, and managing school and camp
 - Teach and remind relatives and friends about your child's food allergies
- EMERGENCY PLANS
 - For some, eating the food can trigger severe symptoms (anaphylaxis)
 - Follow/review emergency treatment plans prescribed by your doctor
 - Review the "Anaphylaxis" information from this program

WILL IT GO AWAY?

- Many food allergies go away with time, expect to have your child periodically re-tested
- DO NOT try foods you have been avoiding on your own, ask your doctor

WHAT SHOULD I ASK/TELL MY DOCTOR?

- Let your doctor know of any new or worsening symptoms
- Get advice on how to ensure your child gets a nutritious diet
- Ask your doctor for plans about what foods may or may not be safe
- Discuss how and when to use emergency medications and get a written plan
- Discuss your child's risk of developing/having other allergic problems, like asthma

RESOURCES

-This program has additional information sheets that you may find helpful
-Explore additional educational materials, for example, from Food Allergy Research & Education (www.foodallergy.org)