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## LIVING WITH FOOD ALLERGIES

Managing severe food allergies is a daily challenge; full of practical dilemmas and emotional turmoil, but it can be met with success. Your goal is to ensure your child is able to safely enjoy everything children without food allergies do, except for eating the food to which he/she is allergic. Organize your family life around activities that do not involve food like sports, nature, art, or science. Remember you are your child's best advocate.

### **Educate yourself and ask questions**

- Stress can be reduced when you understand the illness and its treatment
- Ask your doctor to explain your child's risks of a reaction and review treatment
  - Ask about likely symptoms from various types of exposure (eating versus touching, eating a small amount versus a large amount)

### **Take things slow and educate others**

- Independent "play dates" might be preceded by supervised ones during which time friends can be educated about food allergy

### **Don't take on all the responsibilities yourself**

- Share care responsibilities with people you trust like family, friends and teachers

### **Be positive**

- Focus on achievements and having fun, not just on food allergy
- Reward positive behaviors (carrying medications, saying "no thank you" to possibly unsafe foods)

### **Be firm**

- Make your child's needs known to schools, relatives, restaurant personnel, etc
- Emergency medications must be carried at all times
- Ensure your child knows and follows age-appropriate "rules" to be safe (no food sharing, report symptoms, carry/use medications)

### **Promote gradual age-appropriate self-care for your child**

- Young children may be taught only to accept food from specific persons
- Children who can read may participate in label reading for safe foods
- Older children can participate in asking questions at a restaurant

### **Suggest substitutions to allow participation**

- Provide safe treats for your child for parties
- Trade food for prizes after "trick or treat" on Halloween

### **Manage emotions**

- Living with food allergy can cause anxiety, fear, sadness, guilt, etc.
- Acknowledge your emotions, do not dwell on them, and find ways to cope (talk to friends, exercise, join a support group)

### **Seek help**

- Talk to your doctor if you feel that your/your child's activities are too restricted, or if negative emotions are intrusive
- Professional help from counselors, psychologists or psychiatrists may be needed

### **REFERENCES/RESOURCES**

Explore additional educational materials, for example, from Food Allergy Research & Education ([www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org))

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