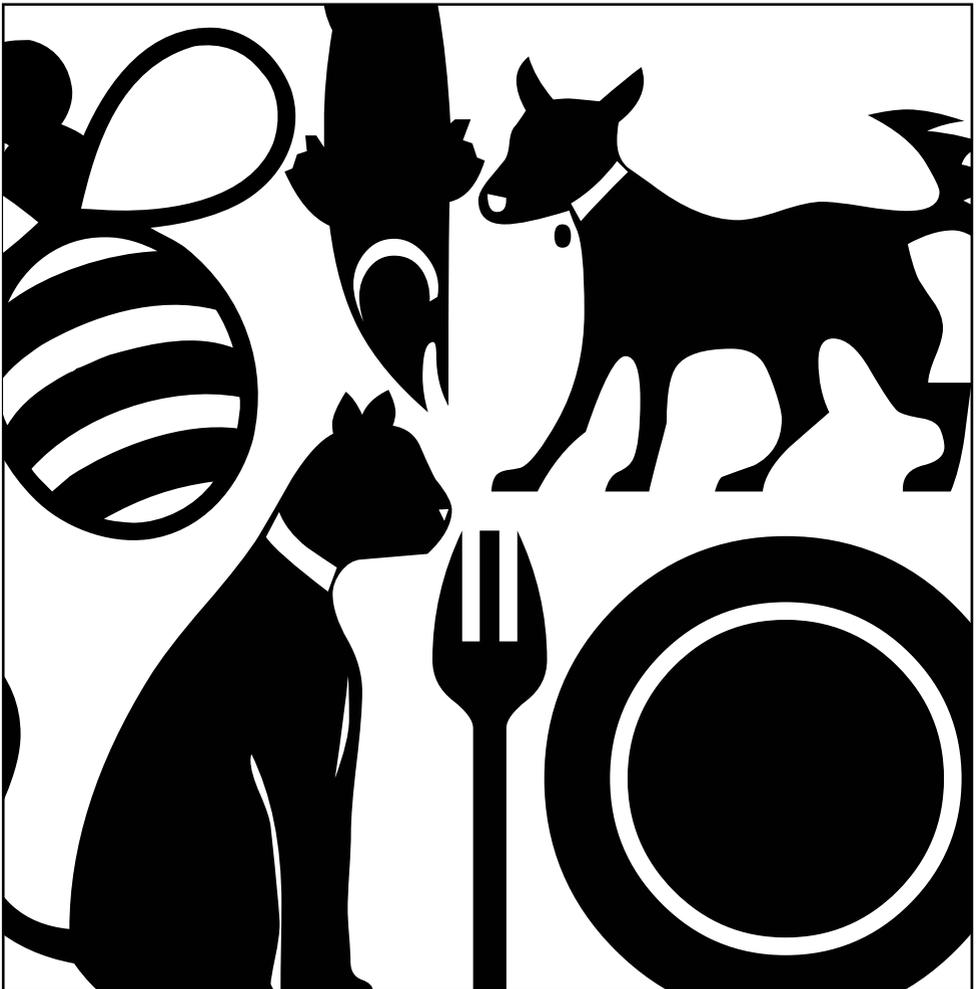


Children's Allergy Clinic

General food challenges at home

Information for parents and carers



What is a food challenge?

A food challenge is a controlled and safe way of finding out whether your child can now tolerate the food or drink they have been avoiding.

It involves them having a very tiny amount of the food or drink which previously might have caused a reaction, then building this amount up if there is no reaction.

Your child's allergy assessment shows that it is now time to discover if they have outgrown their food allergy. Your child's medical history and results have shown that it is safe for you to do this challenge from home.

Step 1: Picking a time for the food challenge

Is your child well?

To do a food challenge your child needs to be in good health. If they have a cold, flu or any other illness they should not do the challenge until they are well.

Also, if your child is asthmatic or gets eczema, don't do the challenge unless their symptoms are well under control.

If you have any doubt about whether your child is well enough, postpone the food challenge for another time.

Where should we do the food challenge?

The food challenge should be done at home in a calm environment with parental or adult supervision.

Carry out the challenge early in the day, so that you have plenty of time to work out whether your child has had a reaction or not.

What if my child takes antihistamines?

It's important that your child does not have any antihistamine medication in their body before doing a food challenge. The antihistamine will suppress any reaction they might have to the food or drink. This might give a false impression that they have outgrown their allergy.

Some antihistamines last longer than others:

- Don't start the challenge if your child has had chlorphenamine (Piriton), Phenergan, or Vallergran within the last 48 hours. Delay the challenge.
- Don't give your child longer acting antihistamines (e.g. cetirizine, loratadine) for a whole week before doing a food challenge.
- It's a good idea, if your child does use regular antihistamines, to do the food challenge at a time in the year when they are least affected by seasonal allergies (e.g. hayfever).

Know what to do if your child has an allergic reaction!

It is important to have antihistamines (and an adrenaline auto injector, if prescribed) available in case your child has a reaction at any stage of the challenge.

Before the food challenge, check the possible allergic symptoms (see below). If any of these symptoms develop, stop the food challenge and treat your child as directed.

Symptoms checklist:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Mild to moderate symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• tingling or itching sensation in the mouth• feeling hot or very cold• intense itching• rapid development of nettle rash/wheals (hives)• swelling, particularly of the face• rising anxiety/feeling scared• nausea and/or vomiting• abdominal pain• looking pale. <p>Treatment: Give antihistamines and monitor your child's condition.</p> | <p>Severe symptoms (possibly life-threatening)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• difficulty in breathing, (e.g. noisy breathing, wheezing, hoarse voice, croupy cough)• decreased level of consciousness, feeling faint, pale and floppy• collapse. <p>Treatment: Call 999 and seek emergency help immediately.</p> <p>If prescribed, use your child's adrenaline auto injector (e.g. Epipen, JEXT or Emerade)</p> |
|--|--|

Step 2: Carrying out a food challenge at home

1. Make sure you have checked all the points under Step 1.
2. Prepare the food you are going to use for the challenge. It may be necessary to disguise it in a food your child is used to eating, such as a small piece of bread, or if it's liquid, in a small amount of drink.
3. Make sure it is not contaminated by anything else and use clean cutlery and crockery.
4. Touch your child's lower lip with a crumb or drop of the food/liquid. Wait 15 minutes.
5. If there are no signs of an allergic reaction after 15 minutes, continue by giving your child a crumb of the food to eat, (or if it's a liquid, a couple of drops). Wait another 15 minutes.
6. If there is no allergic reaction, increase the amounts for the next few stages from a crumb to a pea-sized amount, then a teaspoonful. For liquids, increase to half a teaspoonful then a full teaspoonful. Wait 15 minutes between each step, to see if there is a reaction.
7. If at any stage an allergic reaction occurs, stop the challenge and give some antihistamine. Continue to watch your child for 6-10 hours, as some allergic symptoms can develop a few hours after eating.
8. Severe reactions at this stage will be extremely rare. In the unlikely event that your child has a severe reaction, seek emergency help immediately. Continue to exclude that food item from their diet. When your child has recovered, please contact the Children's Allergy Clinic for a reassessment of their allergy management.
9. If this challenge is symptom free, then gradually add the food to your child's diet. If the challenge fails and your child has a mild/moderate reaction, then try again about 6 months later.

How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact:

Dr C. Robertson

Consultant Paediatrician with interest in allergy

Tel: **01865 231 994**

Dr F. Obetoh and Dr T. Umasunthar

Consultant Paediatricians with interest in allergy

Tel: **01865 231 961**

Children's Allergy Nurses

Tel: **01865 231 994**

Dr J. Reed

Consultant Dermatologist

Department of Dermatology

Churchill Hospital

Tel: **01865 228 224**

Dr J. Sims

Consultant Paediatrician with interest in allergy

(Horton General Hospital)

Tel: **01295 229 012**

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

Making a difference across our hospitals

charity@ouh.nhs.uk | 01865 743 444 | hospitalcharity.co.uk

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)



Author: Judith Ward, Children's Allergy Nurse
December 2018
Review: December 2021
Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

