



# Food Allergies in Children

## What is food allergy?

The immune system helps to protect us from infection by identifying and attacking bacteria or viruses that cause illness. When the immune system mistakenly responds to

a food protein, inflammation and damage will result.

### Symptoms include:

- Poor feeding
- Irritability
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Bloody stools

## How common is food allergy?

About 5% of all children under the age of three years are allergic to one or more foods. They most often react to milk, eggs, soy, wheat, fish, peanuts and berries. However, almost any food protein can cause an allergic response.

## Why do food allergies happen?

The reasons why food allergies occur are not clearly understood, but a child is more likely to develop food allergies when other family members have asthma, eczema, hay fever or allergies.

## Kinds of food allergies

Food allergy presents with *immediate* or *delayed* reactions. In *immediate* reactions, occurring within minutes to hours, the child may develop hives, wheezing, or swelling of the face as well as tightening of the chest. The reaction can be so severe that the child cannot breathe (anaphylaxis). Emergency treatment is needed. Luckily, these dangerous reactions are relatively uncommon.

*Delayed* reactions occur from hours to days after eating the offending food. Symptoms may include vomiting, pain, diarrhea, bloody stools, or poor growth. Some children may have hives or eczema. Delayed reactions are the most common form of food allergy. If a careful history of your child's symptoms and the physical examination suggest food allergy, tests may be performed to help understand and manage the problem.

## How is food allergy diagnosed?

Skin prick tests and RAST (blood) tests are used to test foods that might cause immediate reactions. A negative test for a food tends to rule it out. A positive test means that this food *might* be involved, but it does not mean that the child will have an allergic response to the food.

Your doctor may do an endoscopy to take samples of the lining of the intestine to look for inflammation caused by allergies or an immune system reaction.

A **limited elimination (or hypoallergenic)** diet may be tried to see if symptoms go away when common allergy-causing foods are not eaten. If the child is better on the elimination diet, foods are gradually added back to see if the symptoms return.

For more information or to locate a pediatric gastroenterologist in your area please visit our website at: [www.naspghan.org](http://www.naspghan.org)

**IMPORTANT REMINDER:** This information from the North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (NASPGHAN) is intended only to provide general information and not as a definitive basis for diagnosis or treatment in any particular case. It is very important that you consult your doctor about your specific condition.

## SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS:



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