

## What to Bring to the Food Challenge

- **Things for your child to do:** Food challenge appointments are usually completed in three hours; although sometimes longer. Bring things to entertain your child such as books, toys, paper and crayons, electronic devices and other non-edible items. If your child is young, bring a favorite comfort item, such as a stuffed animal or blanket.
- **Change of clothes:** Bring a change of clothes for both you and your child, in the event he/she should vomit or get allergen on his/her clothing (or yours) during the procedure.
- **Food to be challenged:** You will be clearly instructed what to bring. It is essential that the food to be challenged is not contaminated with any other food substance. If the food to be challenged is prepared at home (such as a baked muffin), please read the directions/recipe carefully.
- **Food "vehicles":** Bringing additional food "vehicles" can make a previously avoided food more palatable. To increase the likelihood of successful completion of the challenge, it may be helpful to bring crackers, toast, or cookies that your child eats and enjoys frequently without difficulty as a "vehicle." Example: peanut butter on a familiar piece of toast or cracker or may seem more appetizing than a spoonful of peanut butter alone. Alternatively, applesauce or your child's favorite pureed fruit/vegetable can be mixed with the food to be challenged. *Please note food "vehicles" are your responsibility to bring.*
- **Two epinephrine auto-injectors:** To have with you on the car ride home.

## Strategies to Make the Foods Less Scary for the Child

A child who has spent years learning to avoid a food may understandably be frightened by the thought of being given that particular food. There are many things that can be done to help make the test less frightening. Depending on the child's age, the possibilities include:

- Using the child's familiar sippy cup from home
- Using the child's own dishes and silverware from home
- Mixing liquids with a safe liquid that the child enjoys
- Feeding the child an allergen-free version of the food at home for a few weeks prior to the test, to help them become familiar with the food's look, taste, texture and consistency
- Serving nut butters spread on a favorite cracker or piece of bread
- Serving the food with ketchup, syrup or another safe and familiar condiment

Many parents or caregivers experience anxiety before or during their child's food challenge. It is important to acknowledge these worries and talk about them with your child's allergist. It is also important not to let your child know about your anxiety or to shift your worries onto your child.

## Your Child Must Be Healthy on the Day of the Food Challenge

On the day of the food challenge, your child must be healthy to ensure your child has the best chance of passing his or her food challenge. If your child is ill (i.e. fever, cough, chills, etc.), your food challenge needs to be rescheduled. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our office.

If your child has **asthma**, **rhinitis**, or **eczema**, this condition must be well-controlled, and not in the middle of a flare-up at the time of the challenge.

Avoid antihistamines such as Zyrtec, Allegra, or Claritin for one week prior to the challenge. Avoid Benadryl for 24 hours prior.

## What to Expect During the Food Challenge

- **Supervision** – The challenge will be conducted by a nurse, under the supervision of a physician or nurse practitioner.
- **A Safe Environment** – In addition to close supervision from a trained nurse, a doctor/nurse practitioner will always be nearby and available. Emergency medications (including epinephrine, albuterol, antihistamine and other emergency medications) will all be on hand and ready to be used.
- **The Use of Measured, Increasing (Graded) Doses** –The test does not start with a full serving. In fact, percutaneous or "scratch" testing to the food to be challenged will be done before being ingested. During the

Adapted from <http://www.kidswithfoodallergies.org/page/oral-food-challenges-for-food-allergy-diagnosis-test.aspx> and tailored to Grand Rapids Allergy protocol.

ingestion process, a small measured portion will be given first. If no symptoms develop after 10 to 20 minutes, then another, slightly larger amount of the food will be given. If things go well, this process will be repeated. The goal is to work up to a full serving size for your child's age.

- **No Forcing or Tricks** – Various methods will be used to encourage your child to eat the food; however, your child will never be forced to do so. If he or she absolutely refuses to eat the food, the test will be stopped and rescheduled for another time. The food being tested may be mixed with another food that is known to be safe in order to make it more palatable (see previous page).

## **What Happens If My Child Has a Reaction?**

Depending on the severity of the reaction (i.e. hives versus anaphylaxis), treatment can involve discontinuing the challenge and observing the child, giving antihistamines and/or asthma medications, and/or administering epinephrine.

If it is developmentally and medically appropriate, you (or the parent/caregiver who is present) and your child will be involved in the treatment process.

The food challenge itself will be halted. Depending on the severity of the reaction, your child will be kept for another period of observation.

## **A Reaction Can Also Be a Learning Opportunity**

For older children who have no memory of their last allergic reaction, experiencing a reaction during the food challenge can be an excellent opportunity for the child (and you!) to see that if a reaction occurs it can be treated. It also gives the child the opportunity to experience what a reaction might feel like, to help him or her recognize the feeling if it should ever occur again. Plus, it can be an opportunity for the family to participate in understanding how to treat a reaction.

Of course, a reaction can be a terrible disappointment for both you and your child. Help your child to see the experience in a positive light and not as a failure.

## **What Happens If My Child Does Not Have a Reaction?**

Once the test is complete your child will be observed for an additional period of time. If all is well, this means that your child "passed" the test! You will be sent home with specific instructions regarding how much and how often this food is to be in your child's diet.