Children’s food challenge

Your child has been asked to come to the John Atwell day ward for a food challenge, these are performed in hospital as it is the safest way of finding out if your child reacts to a food.

Types of food challenges

**Diagnostic** – sometimes it is unclear if a food is causing the reaction, this needs to be confirmed.

**Resolution** – to see if a food allergy is outgrown and the food can be tolerated and reintroduced into your child’s diet.

**Demonstration** – for teenagers who have never been exposed or were too young to remember an allergic reaction. This will show what the early stages of an allergic reaction feel like and how they respond to treatment.

On the day

A challenge will normally take half a day but you may need to be on the ward all day.

When you arrive you and your child will have the opportunity to ask questions and you will be asked to sign a consent form.

Before the food challenge is started your child will be examined and the state of their general health recorded.

Most challenges start with just lip contact, followed by eating or drinking increasing measured amounts at timed intervals.

Throughout the challenge a specially trained nurse will monitor your child and record their heart rate, breathing, blood pressure and check for wheezing. Your child must stay on the ward during the challenge and for at least two hours after the challenge is stopped.

You will be given written and verbal advice before going home and we will phone your GP on the day.

Allergic reactions

Food challenges can cause an allergic reaction, most involving the eyes, nose, mouth, skin or gut. Anaphylaxis is a more severe form of these symptoms and can involve the airway, breathing or circulation.

Your child will be constantly assessed throughout the challenge and any symptoms will be monitored and treated as necessary. Anaphylaxis is very unusual during a food challenge.

Before you come to the hospital stop any antihistamine treatment

So we can get a reliable result from the challenge it is important that all antihistamine treatment is stopped for four days before the challenge, this should include medicines like Loratidine, Cetirizine, Claritin®, Zirtek® and Piriton®.

Some cough medicines contain antihistamine, if you are not sure, phone the John Atwell day ward for advice.
If your child has hay fever
It is not advisable for him or her to have a food challenge during the pollen season.

We will arrange another date when it is safe to stop their antihistamine treatment.

If your child is unwell
It is important that your child is well on the day of the challenge so if they have any illness, a cold, cough or a temperature please contact the ward and arrange another date.

When you come to the hospital
Please bring some of your child’s favourite snack foods as it is often necessary to disguise new tastes for young children. A packed lunch from home can be very helpful.

Remember to carry your child’s rescue medicines with you at all times, even when visiting the hospital.

After the challenge
If your child has reacted to the food during the challenge, he or she should not do strenuous play and activities for the rest of the day as this could bring on a delayed reaction. A delayed reaction can happen up to 48 hours later.

If your child has not reacted to the food during the challenge, he or she should not eat the food until the following day in case of delayed symptoms.

Before you go home you will be given an emergency treatment plan and clear instructions on how to treat an allergic reaction if needed.

If your child does not react to the challenge it is important to introduce the food into your child’s diet. Contact the allergy clinic to speak to the dietitian if there are problems with this.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact
The children’s allergy team at Southampton General Hospital
Outpatient’s appointments: 023 8079 4075
Team administrator: 023 8079 4335
John Atwell day ward: 023 8079 4511 or 023 8079 6157
Email: childrensallergy@uhs.nhs.uk
Website: www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrensallergy

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8079 4688 for help.