

Children's food challenge

Information for patients, parents and guardians

We have given you this factsheet because your child has been asked to come to the John Atwell day ward for a food challenge. It includes what a food challenge is, what will happen during the challenge and how to care for your child after the challenge. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our allergy team.

What is a food challenge?

A food challenge is a test to confirm whether your child has a food allergy or to see if your child has outgrown a food allergy.

We will gradually give your child an increasing amount of a specific food to see if they develop a reaction. Only one food can be tested at a time.

Challenge tests are always performed in hospital under close supervision of medically trained staff.

Types of food challenges

Diagnostic

Sometimes it is unclear if a food is causing the reaction. This test will confirm whether your child is allergic to the food or not.

Resolution

This test will confirm whether your child has outgrown their food allergy.

Demonstration

This test is for teenagers who have never been exposed to certain foods or were too young to remember an allergic reaction. This test will show the young person what the early stages of an allergic reaction feel like so that they can recognise these symptoms if they have an allergic reaction in the future.

Prevention

In some cases, this test may be able to stop babies from becoming allergic to peanuts.

On the day

A food 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 any questions. If you are happy to go ahead with the challenge, we will ask you to sign a consent form.

Before we begin the food challenge, we will examine your child and record their general state of health.

Throughout the challenge, a specially trained nurse will monitor your child and record their heart rate, breathing and 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 finished.

We will give you written and verbal advice before you leave hospital. We will also send a letter to your GP with the results of the food challenge.

Allergic reactions

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

We will assess your child throughout the challenge. We will monitor their symptoms and treat these as necessary.

Antihistamine treatment

In order to get a reliable result, it is important that all antihistamine treatment is stopped four days before the challenge. This includes medicines such as Loratadine, Cetirizine, Clarityn®, Zirtek® and Piriton®. Some cough medicines also contain antihistamine. If you are not sure, please phone us for advice.

If your child has hay fever

We do not advise that your child has 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. If they have any illness, including a cough, a cold or a temperature, please contact us and we will arrange another date for their food challenge.

When you come to the hospital

Please bring some of your child's favourite snack foods with you, 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

Your child should not take part in any strenuous play or activities for the rest of the day, as this could bring on a delayed reaction.

Your child should not eat the food for 48 hours (even if they did not react to the food during the challenge), in case of delayed symptoms.

If your child has reacted, we will give you an emergency treatment plan and clear instructions on how to treat an allergic reaction.

If your child does not react to the challenge, it is important to introduce the food into your child's diet after 48 hours. Contact us to speak to the dietitian if you have any problems with this.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the children's allergy team.

Outpatient appointments
Telephone: **023 8120 4477**

Team administrator
Telephone: **023 8120 4335**

John Atwell day ward
Telephone: **023 8120 4511** or **023 8120 6157**

Email: childrensallergy@uhs.nhs.uk
Website: www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrensallergy

For a translation of this document, or a version in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **023 8120 4688**.

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital please visit www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalneeds

www.uhs.nhs.uk/childrenshospital

Version 3. Published March 2020. Due for review March 2023. 2424