# How to lower the chance of your baby getting a food allergy

Children's℠
Healthcare of Atlanta

## What is a food allergy?

A food allergy:
- Is due to an abnormal immune response.
- Happens after contact with a food.
- Most often happens after swallowing a food.

With a food allergy:
- A person's immune system reacts to a food protein because the body thinks that food protein is a threat. The body's response is what we know as an allergic reaction.
- The first symptoms of the allergic reaction most often happen within a few minutes or up to 2 hours after the person is exposed to a food.
  - Symptoms can range from mild to severe, or even life-threatening.
  - A person may have 1 symptom or a mix of different symptoms.

## How can I lower the chance of my baby getting a food allergy?

Foods that may cause food allergies are called food allergens. Giving common food allergens early in the first year of life has been shown to lower the chance of your baby developing a food allergy.

## When can my baby eat solid foods?

Your baby may be ready to start eating solid foods around 4 to 6 months of age. Every baby is different. Signs your baby is ready to start eating solid foods include:
- Sitting without support
- Good head and neck control
- Opening the mouth for a spoon
- Bringing objects to their mouth
- Showing interest in food

## How do I start giving solid foods?

- Some foods could cause choking. Prepare foods that are OK for your baby's age and have the right texture. The food should easily dissolve in saliva (spit). Your baby should not need to chew it.
- Feed your baby in a highchair. Stay with them the whole time.
- Allow your baby to taste small amounts of purees first. Start by only giving 1 new food at each feeding.
- Start with iron and zinc rich foods, such as cereals or pureed meats. Then, try giving fruits and vegetables.
- After your baby does OK with these foods, start giving food allergens.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

## What are the most common food allergens?

The most common food allergens are:

- Milk
- Egg
- Wheat
- Soy
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Sesame
- Peanut

- Tree nuts, such as:
  - Almonds
  - Cashews
  - Pistachios
  - Walnuts
  - Pecans
  - Hazelnuts

## What if my baby is at high risk for peanut allergy?

Your baby may be at high risk for peanut allergy if they have very bad eczema, egg allergy or both. Talk with the doctor **before** giving your baby peanut-containing foods.

## How do I start giving food allergens?

Introduce 1 new food at a time. First, give a small taste and wait 10 minutes. If there are no signs of an allergic reaction, you may give the rest of it at your baby's usual eating speed.

At each feeding:
- Pick a time when your baby is well, not sick.
- Plan to pay close attention to your baby for at least 2 hours to watch for an allergic reaction.
- Puree or mix with foods your baby is already eating.

## How do I add peanut to my baby's diet?

There are several ways you can start adding peanut to your baby's diet. Only try 1 way at a feeding.

- Put 2 teaspoons of smooth peanut butter in a bowl. Slowly add 2 to 3 teaspoons of water, breast milk or formula. Stir until peanut butter is thinned and well blended, **OR**

- Put 2 teaspoons of smooth peanut butter in a bowl. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons of pureed fruit or vegetables that your baby has eaten before, **OR**

- Put 1 teaspoon of peanut butter powder in a bowl. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons of pureed fruit or vegetable that your baby has eaten before.

**Please note:**
- Use a measuring spoon for the peanut product. Do not use kitchen spoons.
  - A teaspoon may say tsp.
  - A tablespoon may say Tbsp.
- Whole peanuts, peanut chunks and un-thinned peanut butter could cause choking and are not safe for babies to eat.

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## How do I add other top allergens to my baby's diet?

Some tips for adding other top food allergens are listed in the table below.

| Food allergen | Foods to try |
|---|---|
| Egg | Offer scrambled or hard-boiled eggs. This includes egg whites and egg yolks. Be sure to fully cook all parts of the egg before giving them to your baby. |
| Milk (dairy) | Give plain, full-fat yogurt as a way to add milk to your baby's diet. |
| Tree nuts | Mix nut butter, such as Trader Joe's mixed nut butter, with water or pureed foods. |
| Sesame | Mix hummus or tahini with water or pureed foods. |
| Soy | Offer soy yogurt, tofu or edamame (mashed or pureed). |
| Wheat | Offer wheat cereal, such as Cream of Wheat or Gerber wheat cereal. |

## What should I do if my baby has symptoms of allergic reaction?

Call the doctor if your baby has mild symptoms, such as:

- A new rash
- A few hives
- Mild itching

Call 911 **right away** if your baby has symptoms of severe allergic reaction. Severe symptoms may include:

- Many hives over the body
- Redness over the body
- Shortness of breath, wheezing or repeated coughing
- Pale or blue skin color
- Very bad swelling to the tongue or lips
- Repeated vomiting
- Very bad diarrhea
- Sudden tiredness or going limp
- Mix of symptoms from different body areas

## Where can I learn more?

For more details, you may visit babysfirst.org.

**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or
a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.**

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