



Being Prepared for Food Allergies Makes for Fun and Safe Meal Times

By Suzy Fielders

Many parents have trouble getting their children to eat meals, but some parents have issues with the food itself. For children with food allergies, seemingly harmless foods can lead to much more than a stomachache. In order to stay safe, it is vital that parents, family and friends of children with food allergies be informed of the symptoms and treatments of allergic reactions. Below is some information to help families stay safe, but not miss out on enjoying meal times and tasty food.

Unlike food intolerances and celiac, food allergies can cause severe and even life-threatening reactions, so it's imperative to know how to treat those reactions quickly. Symptoms of allergic reactions vary from mild symptoms, like rashes and hives, to severe reactions, such as trouble breathing and loss of consciousness. In order to diagnose a food allergy, an allergist must conduct skin prick tests and blood tests. If a family has a history of food allergies or a child's had multiple illnesses, then it is a good idea to request allergy testing.

According to The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network, FAAN, 90% of food allergies can be attributed to these eight foods: milk, egg, peanut, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy and wheat. There is no cure for food allergies, so avoidance is the only option. In some cases food allergies can be outgrown, especially dairy, but often times peanut, tree nut, and shellfish allergies are lifelong.

How does one avoid allergens in order to stay safe? The best way is to make sure all those around a child with food allergies are well aware of what food(s) the child needs to avoid. It is a good idea for these children to wear bracelets that identify their allergies. When going to parties, ask prior to going

what foods will be there and if the allergy-inducing foods will be kept separate from the other food. Unfortunately, in children with severe food allergies, cross-contamination can easily trigger an allergic reaction. When going out to eat at restaurants, make sure to notify the waiter about the food allergies and have him/her ask the chef if there are any ingredients in their entrée that might include the allergens. Additionally, numerous not-so-obvious ingredients contain food allergens, so it is best-practice to read food labels prior to a child eating the product.

The most important thing to remember is always to be prepared for a reaction. Every child with allergies should have an action plan from their allergist, which covers what symptoms to look for and what medications should be administered. Benadryl is most frequently used in controlling mild reactions and in severe reactions is used with an EpiPen. EpiPens are self-injectable devices that contain epinephrine and are ideal for severe allergic reactions. Not all symptoms are immediately present upon initial contact with a food allergen; in some instances symptoms can take up to two hours to appear.

If a child has an anaphylactic reaction, including facial swelling, difficulty breathing, or an EpiPen was used, then immediately call 911.

Food allergies are not something to be taken lightly, so it is imperative to be prepared and well educated on allergies and reactions.

To learn more about food allergies, visit www.foodallergy.org.

