

## Food Allergy and Anxiety

### What is food allergy anxiety?

You or your child may be worried or nervous about your child's food allergy. It is normal to have some worry. This is called food allergy anxiety.

If the worry about food impacts the child or parent's daily routine, it is important to get help.

### How can I talk to my child about a serious food allergy?

Method	How?
Explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell your child as much about the allergy as possible. Use words they will understand.</li> <li>• Explain simple ways to avoid danger foods.</li> </ul>
Teach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach good habits. Start at a young age. Teach your child to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– carry epinephrine at all times.</li> <li>– avoid the allergen; read labels.</li> <li>– wash hands often.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Make sure teachers know when and how to use epinephrine injector (Epi pen®.) Teach them if they do not know.</li> <li>• Make sure your child and people they are with a lot know <b>when</b> and <b>how</b> to use an epinephrine injector (Epi pen®), in case of an emergency.</li> <li>• Practice using an expired or trainer Epi pen® on an orange. This will help your child and others to be more comfortable using it.</li> </ul>
Use Caution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be <b>careful</b> how you discuss anaphylactic reactions. Avoid the word "death." Use other phrases like, "it could make it really hard to breathe". This will cause children to pay attention and use caution without making them too afraid.</li> <li>• Be <b>aware</b> of how you talk about your child's allergies to others when the child is around. Be careful not to talk about it causing death.</li> <li>• Have a private talk with your child's teacher. The teacher should be told that this food allergy is very serious and could lead to death.</li> <li>• Pay attention to your emotions. Children are very good at picking up on their parent's emotions. Try not to talk with a lot of worry and emotion. Your child may notice that you have a fear or anxiety about their food allergy. This may make them more likely to have anxiety about their food allergen too.</li> </ul>

## What are the signs of anxiety?

If your child has anxiety, watch for:

- Headaches.
- Stomach aches.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Angry, scared, or disruptive behavior when it is time to eat.
- A lot of talk about fear of food, or fear of allergies.
- Avoiding or refusing safe foods because of worry about allergies
- Clinginess that is not normal for a child's age. A child may cling to their parents. They may try to avoid going out of the house due to fear of being exposed to their allergen.

## How can I help my child with anxiety?

- Watch your child. Notice their feelings about their food allergy.
- Have a “worry journal” so your child can write down all of their worries. Talk with your child about these worries.
- Write down a plan to deal with your child's worries. Let them know you will help them with this plan. Ask for help if your child is having trouble doing their regular activities, eating, or if their worries are impacting the family.

### Tips

- Be aware
- Be alert
- Be prepared
- Keep a daily routine

Fear and anxiety are normal, especially when you first learn about a food allergy. If you ever feel like it has gotten out of control, talk to your doctor for help.

## Where can I get more information?

- Food Allergy Research and Education [www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org)
- Anxiety and food allergies website: <http://700childrens.nationwidechildrens.org/anxiety-food-allergies/>.
- (Book) The Food Allergy Experience by Dr. Ruchi Gupta and Denise Bunning. This book includes tips and quotes from real parents of children with food allergies from all age groups.
- CHW Health Facts for You “Relaxation techniques for anxiety.”
- A child psychologist may be able to help your child.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

**This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.**