



About the Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI)

The KTP-NUCMI is the paediatric arm of the National University Hospital and comprises the Departments of Paediatrics, Paediatric Surgery and Neonatology. We provide comprehensive and specialised medical and surgical services for newborns, children and adolescents, and are the only public hospital in Singapore that offers paediatric kidney and liver transplant programmes. Through a generous gift from the Estate of Khoo Teck Puat, we have set up an integrated outpatient facility with medical, diagnostic and rehabilitation services.

For more information about us, visit www.nuh.com.sg/nuhkids.

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Food Allergy



Khoo Teck Puat – National University
Children’s Medical Institute

What is food allergy?

Food allergy is an immunologically-mediated reaction to certain foods. This means that the body's immune system, which usually fights infection, produces substances that react to that food. This can result in wheezing (an asthma attack), hives (skin rash), allergic rhinitis (itchy nose, sneezing and blocked nose), vomiting, and diarrhoea or abdominal discomfort. The reaction tends to happen soon after exposure to the offending food, usually within 30 minutes and can last up to 24 hours.

How common is it?

There is limited information on food allergy in Singapore. It is estimated that not more than 5% of children younger than 12 years old have food allergy and the prevalence declines with age to about 1% in adults.

What do I do if I think my child has a food allergy?

If a reaction is clearly linked to exposure to particular foods and especially if it was severe, you should consult a doctor. In the meantime, your child should avoid the suspected food. Even small amounts of it may cause a similar reaction. Your child will also need to have medicines on standby.

It is good to keep a food diary if you are unsure whether the food causes your child's condition to worsen. It is helpful as it may indicate a hidden ingredient in the food that is causing the reaction. Bring the food diary with you when you consult the doctor.

Do not make the mistake of labelling your child with multiple food allergies without good

evidence. Your child is growing and needs a variety of food to ensure adequate nutrition. Do consult a doctor for a diagnosis. There are simple allergy skin prick tests that can be done to aid diagnosis.

Will my child outgrow the food allergy?

Children usually outgrow some food allergies such as milk and eggs but it is unlikely with seafood or nut allergy. Your doctor may recommend re-testing after a certain age to confirm that the allergic reaction has weaned.

What food will trigger allergic reactions?

In a study done locally, bird's nest is the common cause of severe food allergy such as anaphylactic shock. Other food that can trigger allergic reactions are eggs and milk, especially in children. Nuts and fishes are known to cause allergic reactions in Western populations but are less common in Singapore.

Cold drinks and chocolate do not commonly cause allergic reactions. Many different factors can trigger allergic reactions and should be thoroughly evaluated before attributing reactions to food allergy. Poorly controlled asthma is more commonly a predisposing factor that allows multiple triggers to worsen asthma symptoms. However, before changing your child's diet, ensure that he or she has been properly evaluated by a paediatrician specialising in allergy.

The information provided in this publication is meant purely for educational purposes and may not be used as a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. You should seek the advice of your doctor or a qualified healthcare provider before starting any treatment or if you have any questions related to your health, physical fitness or medical condition.

Information is correct at the time of printing (Dec 2019) and subject to revision without prior notice.