

Food Challenge

This leaflet explains more about a food challenge, including the benefits, risks, alternatives and what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a food challenge?

Food challenges are the only way to definitively achieve a diagnosis of food allergy or tolerance. Your child will usually have been seen in clinic and will have had skin prick tests and/or blood tests. Your child's history, along with the test results, indicates that the challenge food may be tolerated. Therefore, your clinician has requested that your child attends for a food challenge.

Why should I have a food challenge?

A food challenge can help you find out whether your child is tolerant of the food being tested. If your child tolerates the food it can then be included in their diet. For most foods, we will recommend that the food is included on a regular basis (twice weekly) to ensure tolerance is maintained. This should hopefully improve your quality of life, allowing you to make eating outside the home setting easier, reducing the time spent on checking labels and shopping for food. If during the challenge, a reaction does occur, you will know that you need to continue to avoid the food.

Are there any alternatives?

The alternative to not undergoing a food challenge would be to continue avoiding the food.

What are the risks?

Your child may have an allergic reaction during the food challenge. Reactions may be mild / moderate or severe (anaphylaxis). This is why the procedure is carried out in a hospital setting. Allergy specialists will be available to monitor for any signs of an allergic reaction and give medication to relieve the symptoms if required.

It is important that your child is well and any other existing conditions such as eczema and asthma are under control before undertaking a food challenge.

How can I prepare for a food challenge?

Preparing your child for their food challenge will help them to understand what is happening. It is not uncommon for you and your child to feel anxious about eating a food you have been told to avoid, or that has made your child unwell in the past. Talking to your child in advance will give them time to ask any questions or voice any concerns which they may have. Use familiar words that your child will understand, and give truthful, factual information.

Explain that your child will meet doctors and nurses and that they should only have to stay in hospital for a day. You may wish to bring some familiar toys or books with you to help your child feel at ease when they are with us.

What do I need to bring with me?

You will need to bring with you the food your child will be challenged to eat on the day of the challenge. This would be in the form that your child is most likely to eat, e.g. for a nut challenge bring whole nuts, ground nuts or nut butters.

Your child may not like the new flavour or texture of the food that they are being asked to eat so it may be useful for you to bring foods that the challenge food can be mixed with or eaten alongside e.g. fruit puree or yoghurts.

As you will be spending a few hours with us, we recommend that you bring with you a packed lunch and snacks for your child. You will also need to bring with you your child's allergy medications, any inhalers and spacer devices.

We will contact you a few days before the appointment to confirm your attendance, advise you what you need to bring with you for the appointment and to answer any questions which you may have. If we have been unable to contact you, please ensure you have spoken to us before attending for the food challenge appointment. Our number can be found towards the end of this information sheet.

Are there any medicines that need to be stopped for the food challenge?

Please stop all antihistamines (Chlorphenamine Maleate (Piriton), Cetirizine (Piriteze, Zirtek), Loratadine (Claritin), Fexofenadine (Allegra)) for at least five days before the challenge appointment. Some other medicines, such as cough medicines, also contain antihistamines.

If you are unsure whether your medications contain antihistamines or when to stop taking them, please contact us for further advice. If your child has been prescribed inhalers, you must continue to use the preventer inhalers. However, please contact us if your child needs to use their blue inhaler (Salbutamol) more regularly in the week leading up to the challenge.

What happens on the day of the food challenge?

When you arrive for the food challenge, an allergy specialist will explain the challenge in more detail and ask you a few questions. We will ask you to sign a consent form if you are happy to go ahead with the challenge.

The nurse will check your child is well for the challenge and take their temperature, heart rate, oxygen levels, blood pressure and listen to their chest.

Following this, under close supervision, your child will eat 4-5 portions of the food in increasing amounts, at 20 minute intervals. After all the required portions have been eaten, your child will be observed for two hours to monitor for any signs of an allergic reaction.

If a reaction occurs at any point the food challenge will be stopped and your child will be treated accordingly. This may involve being monitored for 2-4 hours. Rarely, in more severe reactions your child may need to stay overnight in hospital.

Your food challenge appointment is likely to last for approximately five hours.

What happens after the food challenge?

If your child has an allergic reaction (positive challenge) this means your child is still allergic to the food and they must continue to avoid eating this food.

If your child does not have an allergic reaction (negative challenge) you will be advised to introduce the food into your child's diet after 48 hours (to check that there are no delayed symptoms) and to eat this at least twice a week. If you do not think that you/your child will be keen to introduce this food into his/her diet regularly, please discuss this with your clinician.

If during the 48 hours after the challenge you notice any reactions or have any concerns, please contact us 020 8725 4219, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays) between 8.30am to 4.30pm.

In case of an emergency such as anaphylaxis please call 999 promptly after giving the adrenaline medication.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

This will depend on the outcome of the food challenge and we will arrange for any follow up appointments if needed. We will talk with you about any changes in your child's treatment or diet before you go home. We will write to your GP about the challenge result and a copy of this letter will also be sent to you.

Further Information

Anaphylaxis Campaign www.anaphylaxis.org.uk or 01252 542 029

Allergy UK www.allergyuk.org or 01322 619898

Contact us

If you have any questions or worries about a food challenge, please call the allergy nurses on 020 8725 4219, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays) between 8.30am to 4.30pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.

Food Challenge Check List For Parent and Child	Yes	No
We understand why my child is having a food challenge		
We understand the benefits of the food challenge		
We are happy to go ahead with the food challenge		
My child is happy to eat the food on the challenge day		
My child has not taken any antihistamines for five days before the challenge		
My child has not been unwell		
I will bring my child's allergy medication on the challenge day		
I will bring the food to be challenged with us on the challenge day		



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