

Healthy Living With Head Start

Know the Facts: Food Allergies

What is a Food Allergy?

As kids learn and grow, it's important that we introduce new foods to expose them to new flavors, cultures, and textures. But what happens when a child has a reaction to a new food? Does a reaction always mean a child has an allergy?

A **food allergy** is an immune response to a certain component of a food. Even though this food is harmless, our immune system mistakes it as a foreign attacker that could make us sick. As a result, the immune system produces a reaction to fight against the food, which gives us allergy symptoms like rashes, swelling, and itchiness.

Not every reaction is an allergy, your child might be experiencing food intolerances. A **food intolerance** doesn't involve the immune system. Instead, symptoms like upset stomach, gas, and diarrhea are caused by difficulty digesting a particular food or food component.

Common Food Allergies:

- * Milk
- * Eggs
- * Fish
- * Shellfish
- * Tree nuts
- * Peanuts
- * Wheat
- * Soy

Common Food Intolerances:

- * **Lactose Intolerance:** The body lacks an enzyme for breaking down the sugars (Lactose) in milk and some dairy products, causing discomfort.
- * **Gluten Intolerance:** The body has an adverse reaction to gluten, a specific protein in wheat products.



I Think My Child Has a Food Allergy...

If you suspect your child has a food allergy, you should see your doctor, who may refer you to an allergist. Never self-diagnose food allergies or restrict foods from your child's diet; by avoiding some foods, you may be depriving your child of important nutrients needed for physical and mental growth and development.

Keep in mind, if you misdiagnose your child has having a food allergy, you might actually be doing more harm by restricting foods than by allowing them.



How does the doctor diagnose allergies?

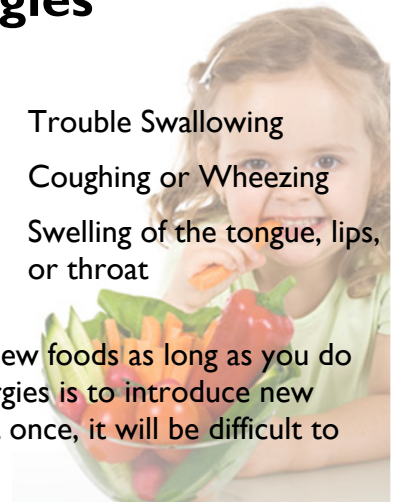
1. **Skin Prick Test:** A drop of solution containing the allergen is placed on the individual's skin. The doctor will use a fingernail or small needle to scratch the skin's surface, and look for a reaction.
2. **Blood Tests:** A simple blood draw is taken and tested. Results will take a few days.
3. **Oral Food Challenge:** An allergist feeds the individual small doses of the suspected food, and gradually increases the size of each dose, looking for a reaction. This should only be done under the supervision of a medical professional to ensure safety.
4. **Trial Elimination Test:** An allergist asks you to temporarily cut out a food from the individual's diet (usually for about 2-4 weeks) and then monitors symptoms. Foods are then gradually reintroduced. If symptoms initially go away, but then return upon adding the food back, the doctor will diagnose an allergy.

Recognizing Food Allergies

Common Allergy Symptoms:

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|---|
| * Hives | * Itchy Eyes/Ears | * Trouble Swallowing |
| * Nausea/Vomiting | * Nasal Congestion | * Coughing or Wheezing |
| * Stomach Pain | * Runny Nose | * Swelling of the tongue, lips, or throat |
| * Sneezing | * Eczema | |

Fear of food allergies is no reason to stop exposing your child to new foods as long as you do so with attention and care. The best way to help identify food allergies is to introduce new foods one at a time. When you introduce multiple new foods all at once, it will be difficult to know which food is to blame if your child has a reaction.



**Note: swelling of the tongue, lips, or throat may be a sign of anaphylaxis. Seek emergency medical attention immediately if you or your child experiences these symptoms*

Food Critic in Training

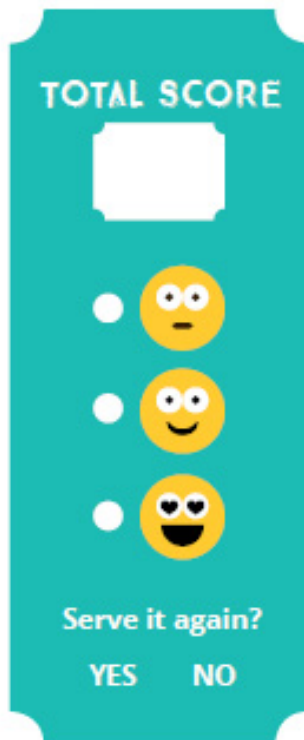
Introducing a new food at family meals can be challenging at times. Beyond picky eating and tantrums at the table, you also can run into some foods that cause rashes, upset tummies, and other reactions. Making this stressful time into a fun game of rating and exploring food is a great way to help your child try a new food by itself to ensure a successful introduction.

Check out www.choosemyplate.gov/families for this activity and more!



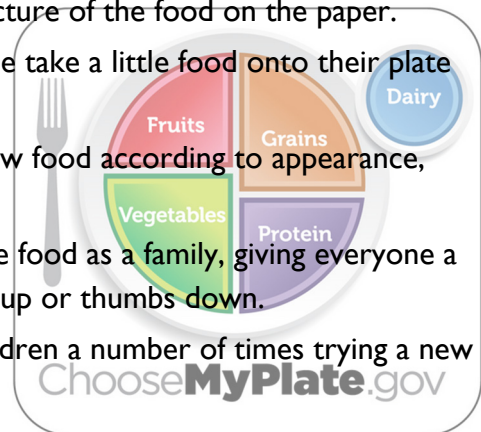
Materials:

- * Piece of paper
- * Pen/Pencil
- * Crayons or colored pencils
- * A new food to try



Directions

- * Give everyone in your family a piece of paper, pencil, crayons.
- * Place a plate or bowl full of the new food in the center of the table.
- * Take time to talk about how it looks and smells as a family while everyone draws a picture of the food on the paper.
- * Let each person at the table take a little food onto their plate and have a taste test.
- * Have everyone rate the new food according to appearance, smell, taste, and texture.
- * Take time to talk about the food as a family, giving everyone a chance to give it a thumbs up or thumbs down.
- * Remember, it can take children a number of times trying a new food to like it.



Making Mealtime Memories

Stunning Stuffed Peppers

Incorporating fresh, colorful produce into our meals can mean more than just tossed salads! Getting creative with how we prepare fruits and vegetables keeps everyone interested. This colorful dinner idea provides plenty of vitamins, minerals, and fiber, and is easy enough for any weeknight. Plus, each person gets their own perfectly-sized portion!

Ingredients

- * 1 lb. lean ground meat
- * 4 large bell peppers (green, red, orange, or yellow)
- * 2 tablespoons chopped onion
- * 1 or 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- * 1 (15 oz.) can tomato sauce
- * 4 cups cooked brown rice
- * 3/4 cup shredded mozzarella cheese (optional)




Fun Fact: The brighter in color your pepper, the greater its content of Vitamin C!

Directions

- * In a large pan, cook onions and ground meat until brown. Drain off any excess fat. Stir in rice, garlic, and 1 cup of tomato sauce.
- * Cut a thin slice from the top of each pepper, creating a "lid". Scrape out seeds and membranes from the pepper's inside. Rinse each pepper.
- * Preheat oven to 350°F.
- * In a baking dish, stand each pepper upright.
- * Scoop the meat and rice mixture into each pepper. Pour remaining tomato sauce over the top, and sprinkle with cheese.
- * Replace each pepper's top and bake in oven for 10 minutes, or until peppers are crisp-tender.

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Please contact Amy Nieves, Head Start Dental/Nutrition Specialist, with any questions or comments at (607) 433 - 8060

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