

Jenny Lind Children's Department **Food Challenges and Supervised Feeds**

Information for Parents and Carers

Food challenges and supervised feeds are tests that are performed in hospital to see if your child is allergic to or able to tolerate a particular food.

The aim of this leaflet is to explain what to expect when your child has a food challenge in hospital.

What is a food challenge?

A food challenge is when a certain food, which we suspect that your child may have an allergy to, is fed to your child under close medical supervision. This is done by gradually giving bigger doses of the suspected food over a certain amount of time, until a reaction occurs or the "top dose" is eaten without any adverse reaction. The top dose is the amount that a child would be expected to eat in a normal portion. A food challenge usually lasts for up to five hours.

What is a supervised feed?

A supervised feed is similar to a food challenge, but your child will only need to eat one "dose" of the food. This will be a similarly-sized portion to what you would expect your child to eat in normal circumstances. It will be given gradually over a period of thirty minutes to mimic a normal meal. A supervised feed usually lasts for two hours.

Why do we carry out food challenges?

Food challenges are carried out:

- when we need to find out whether a food is causing your child to have an allergic reaction;
- or
- to confirm whether your child has outgrown a previously confirmed allergy. Some children may outgrow their allergies and may be able to tolerate the food that was previously causing them to have an allergic reaction.

Are there any risks associated with a food challenge?

There is a potential risk that your child may have a reaction to the food they are being challenged to. This is why the challenge is done in hospital. Your child will be closely monitored by a nurse for any signs of an allergic reaction, such as itchy rash, vomiting, puffy lips or breathing difficulties. Doctors are always available if needed.

If your child has a mild reaction or it is not clear if this is a response to the food then the dose might be repeated in order to establish clarity. If it is felt to be an allergic

reaction, the food challenge will be stopped. A relevant medicine will be given to relieve the symptoms and to stop the reaction getting worse – this may be an antihistamine or, in a severe reaction, adrenaline may be given.

Are there any alternatives to a food challenge?

If your child does not have the food challenge, they will need to continue to avoid the food that they are considered to be allergic to. Children often outgrow some of their allergies and a food challenge is the only safe way and definitive way of knowing this. Teenagers who have avoided the food for most of their lives and are unable to remember a reaction may have a false sense of security and trial the food independently, which could be potentially dangerous.

How is the appointment arranged?

You will be contacted by telephone to agree the date of the challenge. This will be confirmed in writing. A text message reminder will be sent a week before the challenge date.

How to prepare for the food challenge

The week before the challenge:

- 5 days before the challenge, stop all antihistamines.
- However, if your child has a reaction, please give them their antihistamine and **follow their written allergy action plan.** Please contact the Children's Day Ward to rearrange the challenge.
- **Asthma inhalers and eczema creams should not be stopped.**
- Your child needs to be fit and well to undergo the challenge. If your child has symptoms of a cough, cold, diarrhoea or vomiting, or needs to use their reliever (blue) inhaler more frequently in the week before the challenge, please contact us.
- If your child has been started on any oral steroids, please contact us before the challenge to discuss – **do not stop them.**
- If your child takes any other medication not mentioned here, please do not stop them but do call us to discuss.

Preparing your child

Preparing your child for their visit to the hospital will help them understand what is happening. Talking to your child in advance will give them time to ask questions or voice any concerns they may have. Children tend to be more co-operative when they know what is happening to them. Use familiar words that your child will understand and give truthful, factual information.

Although there are toys and books on the ward, you may wish to pack some familiar toys and books as distractions for small children. Older children may wish to bring their devices and headphones etc.

Your child should have breakfast before coming to the hospital. The challenge lasts approximately 6 hours, the last 2 hours being for observation only.

You will also be asked to bring the challenge food with you. This will be discussed with you and if necessary the recipe sent to you.

If you think your child will be reluctant to eat the challenge food, you can bring other foods to hide it in. Please only bring foods that you know your child can tolerate.

Allergen	Ways of introducing food
Cow's milk	Mix with your child's current milk, or over cereal.
Cooked egg	Hard boiled eggs – bring bread to make sandwiches or rice to mix the egg into. Ketchup may be useful.
Nuts	Crackers or raw vegetables often make nut butters easier to eat. Mix chocolate spread into the nut butter.
Fish	Fish fingers, bread and ketchup to make sandwiches, rice to mix with fish.

On the day of the challenge

On arrival your child will be seen by a nurse who will weigh them and measure their height. Their temperature, pulse and blood pressure will also be taken and we will monitor these throughout the day.

The challenge procedure will be explained to you and your child, including the risks and benefits. You will then be asked to sign a consent form. Please do not hesitate to ask the nurses or doctors any questions you may have.

Your child will be given increasing amounts of the food they are being challenged to every 20 minutes. Your child will be checked for an allergic reaction before each dose.

If your child has an allergic reaction at any point during the challenge, it will be stopped immediately. We will treat your child according to the reaction and your child will be monitored until the reaction settles and you are able to go home, usually 2-4 hours. Occasionally children may need to stay in hospital overnight.

Whilst it is really important that you observe your child carefully and listen to and pass on their complaints to the doctors and nurses, it is also very important to be

reassuring to your child. We do not wish to over-interpret the normal anxiety of being in an unfamiliar environment and eating unfamiliar food with new people as an allergic reaction.

What happens after the food challenge?

All children undergoing a food challenge will receive a follow-up telephone call from the dietitian. What happens next depends on whether your child receives a positive or negative test result.

A positive challenge result

This is when your child reacts to any of the doses of food given. A positive reaction means your child is allergic and needs to strictly avoid that food.

A negative challenge result

This is when no reaction occurs to any of the doses of food. Your child will need to stay with us for 2 hours after the final dose of food is given to make sure there is no delayed reaction.

Following discharge home, please avoid the challenge food for 48 hours. This is because there may be delayed reactions during this period. If you are concerned that a reaction is occurring, follow your allergy action plan.

If there are no adverse responses, you can start including the food regularly in the diet according to the dietitian's recommendations. It is advisable to be on the lookout for the development of any adverse symptoms such as pain, diarrhoea or bloatedness.

Your child will need to include a portion of this food in their diet 2-3 times a week. It is possible that children may re-develop an allergy if the food is only eaten infrequently. This is why it is important to commit to having that food in your child's diet regularly.

Follow-up

Your child's consultant will be informed of the outcome of the challenge and a follow-up appointment will be arranged as necessary.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have at any time during your visit. If you have any questions before your visit, please phone **Children's Day Ward on 01603 287170**. They will take a message and we can phone you back.