

# Eczema and food allergies

## WHAT IS ECZEMA?

**Eczema is a common and chronic skin problem.**

The skin is red, itchy and dry. Eczema is related to skin barrier problems and inflammation. Even with treatment, eczema goes through times of getting worse and getting better. Eczema triggers can be hard to find. Families worry sometimes that food allergies may be causing their child's eczema.

## WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGY?

**A food allergy is an abnormal immune response to a food.**

An allergic reaction can happen the first or second time a child eats the food. Signs of a food allergy are hives, flushing, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, trouble breathing, and/or swelling of the lips and face. These can happen within a few minutes to a few hours after eating the food.

### WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON FOOD ALLERGIES?

- » Milk
- » Peanut
- » Tree nuts
- » Egg
- » Soy
- » Wheat
- » Shellfish
- » Fish

## HOW ARE ECZEMA AND FOOD ALLERGIES RELATED?

**Food allergies are more common in children with eczema. The worse the eczema is, the more likely the child is to have them. Although children with eczema can have food allergies, the allergies do not cause eczema.**

Other allergies (such as environmental allergies and allergic asthma) are more common in people with eczema, but those allergies also do not cause eczema.

## HOW WOULD I KNOW IF MY CHILD HAS A FOOD ALLERGY?

The rash with food allergy reactions is usually described as hives: round and ring-like red patches on the skin that may be flat or bumpy, are usually itchy, and happen a few minutes to a few hours after eating the food.

Children can get rashes from some foods touching their skin, though these rashes tend to be irritation and not allergies.

## SHOULD MY CHILD WITH ECZEMA BE TESTED FOR FOOD ALLERGIES?

You should talk with your dermatologist about this. Food allergy testing should not be done if your child has not had a reaction after eating a food. Food allergy testing might find "false positives," which means that your child could be labeled with a food allergy when they do not have one. If you are concerned that your child has a food allergy, you should see an allergist, who can speak with you about this in more detail and talk about any allergy testing that might be needed.

## SHOULD A CHILD WITH ECZEMA OR A BREAST-FEEDING MOTHER AVOID CERTAIN FOODS?

In general, no. Babies or children with eczema should not be put on special diets. Nutritional and growth problems can happen when children do not eat enough. However, if a child is diagnosed with a food allergy, they should not eat that food. Not feeding your child the most common food allergens (like eggs, peanuts, and milk) does not fix eczema.

When pregnant or breast-feeding, avoiding cow's milk, wheat, or eggs does not prevent eczema or food allergies from happening.

*Exception: Infants should not eat honey for reasons other than eczema.*

## WHEN CAN I GIVE SOLID FOODS TO MY INFANT WITH ECZEMA?

Talk to your pediatrician or primary care provider about safe introduction of foods. Eating allergenic foods at a younger age helps to lower the chance of getting food allergies.

Infants with mild to moderate eczema can have peanuts (peanut butter) and other high-risk foods when they are 6 months old. Infants with severe eczema might need to get peanut allergy testing before trying to eat peanut products for the first time. If they are not allergic to peanuts, they can start eating these foods when they are 4-6 months old.

Infants with severe eczema can try to eat the other high-risk foods when they are 4-6 months old without allergy testing.

### FOOD ALLERGY TESTING CAN INCLUDE:

- 1. Skin prick tests:** suspected foods are "pricked" into the skin. Positive tests show a hive within 15 minutes of pricking.
- 2. Blood tests:** IgE antibodies to foods
- 3. Food challenge:** a child eats a suspected food allergen while being closely watched by a doctor.



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