

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Michael K. Corey

The Latest Research on Preventing Nut Allergies

The prevalence of food allergies appears to be on the rise, but researchers don't yet know why. Scientists estimate that approximately 12 million Americans suffer from food allergies. And, as most parents of young children know, more and more children are being diagnosed with nut allergies. In fact, peanut allergy doubled in children over a recent five-year period (1997-2002).

There is very little conclusive scientific data explaining the cause for this upswing. The research can be confusing and, at times, even contradictory. Therefore, in this article, Dr. Corey has summarized the latest research about nut allergies.

What Is a Food Allergy?

When someone has a food allergy, his or her immune system mistakenly believes a particular food is harmful and creates specific antibodies against it. If this individual eats that food, the immune system releases chemicals, including histamine, to protect the body. These chemicals trigger allergic symptoms that can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin and cardiovascular system.

Food allergies can also prompt anaphylaxis. The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network defines anaphylaxis as a serious allergic reaction that is rapid in onset and may cause death. Food allergy is believed to be the leading cause of anaphylaxis outside the hospital setting, accounting for an estimated 50,000 emergency department visits each year (*J Allergy Clin Immunol* 2008; Epub).

Strict avoidance of food allergens and early recognition and management of allergic reactions are vital to preventing serious health consequences.

For individuals with serious allergic conditions, early administration of epinephrine (adrenaline), which is available by prescription in a self-

injectable device, is crucial to successfully treating anaphylactic reactions.

What is clear is that the immune system plays a key role in preventing food allergies. Dr. Corey teaches patients that the chiropractic lifestyle, a way of living that includes regular chiropractic care, exercise, nutrition and other preventive measures, is instrumental in maintaining optimal immune function.

What Causes Nut Allergies?

The only proven risk factors for nut allergy are atopic dermatitis (eczema) and a family history of food allergies.

But theories abound. Some of the more popular are:

Roasted peanuts: One hypothesis is that roasting peanuts (a common practice in the US) produces higher levels of sensitivity compared to boiling peanuts, a common practice in other countries.

Hygiene hypothesis: Another theory is what is known as the "hygiene hypothesis." This theory states that because in the modern, "hygienic" world, young children are not exposed to infectious agents, their immune systems aren't tasked with warding off parasites. As a result, peanut protein is often targeted as harmful.

Maternal nut consumption: Another possibility is that pregnant and nursing women who eat peanuts can pass peanut proteins on to their infants, which in turn boosts risk of allergy.

Despite all the theories, there is actually very little conclusive scientific evidence regarding the origins of nut allergies. Dr. Corey has compiled the highlights of the latest scientific research results on page 2.



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When to Introduce Peanuts

Previous research suggested that early introduction of peanuts into a child's diet led to peanut allergy. In fact, a 1999 study concluded: "It [peanut allergy] is more likely to occur if mothers eat peanuts more frequently during pregnancy and introduce it early to the infant's diet." (*Pediatr Allergy Immunol* 1999;10:27-32.)

But a new 2008 study found that early introduction of peanuts into the diet may actually decrease the risk of developing a peanut allergy. The study looked at Jewish schoolchildren in the UK and Israel and found that Jewish children in the UK are 10 times more likely to have peanut allergy than Jewish children in Israel. This difference is not accounted for by differences in atopy, social class, genetic background or peanut allergenicity.

However, Israeli infants consume peanuts in high quantities in the first year of life, whereas UK infants avoid peanuts. The researchers conclude: "These findings raise the question of whether early introduction of peanut during infancy, rather than avoidance, will prevent the development of PA [peanut allergy]. Additional studies on the effect of early introduction of peanut on allergies are now being conducted." (*J Allergy Clin Immunol* 2008;122:984-91.)

Note: Never introduce any food into your baby's diet without first consulting with your child's health-care practitioner.

Eating Nuts While Pregnant

The research into the effects of maternal nut consumption during pregnancy has also been confusing and contradictory. One 2008 study found that daily nut consumption during pregnancy increased the risk of the baby having asthma. The researchers asked 4,146 pregnant women about their consumption of fruit, vegetables, fish, egg, milk, milk products, nuts and nut products. The researchers then followed their children until 8 years of age.

Daily consumption of nut products increased the risk of childhood wheeze. The researchers conclude: "Results of this study indicate an increased risk of daily versus rare consumption of nut products during pregnancy on childhood asthma outcomes. These findings need to be replicated by other studies before dietary advice can be given to pregnant women." (*Am J Respir Crit Care Med* 2008;15;178:124-31.)

Interestingly, there may be foods you should eat while pregnant to prevent allergies in your child. A 2007 study found a link between maternal consumption of apples and fish during pregnancy and a lowered risk of asthma and allergies.

The study concludes: "There was no evidence for associations between maternal intake of most foods during pregnancy and asthma, respiratory and allergic outcomes in 5-year-old children, except for apples and fish. Consumption of apples and fish during pregnancy may have a protective effect against the development of childhood asthma and allergic disease." (*Thorax* 2007;62:773-9.)

While studies have not found a conclusive link between maternal consumption of peanuts and a peanut allergy in their infants, experts warn that this is not sufficient evidence to prove that there is no risk associated with eating peanuts while pregnant.

If you are pregnant, speak with your health-care provider about the best approach for you to take regarding nut consumption.

Breastfeeding and Food Allergies

Many studies have found a link between exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and a dramatic reduction in food allergies. A 2008 study that focused on dietary approaches to the prevention of food allergy found that "Although some preventive dietary interventions have entered common practice, the level of evidence underpinning these strategies varies."

However, the study does conclude that "Exclusive breast-feeding and delayed introduction of complementary foods from the age of 4-6 months are key strategies in primary food allergy and atopy prevention." (*Curr Opin Clin Nutr Metab Care* 2008;11:320-8.)

A late 2008 study concurs, "In high-risk infants, there is evidence that exclusive breastfeeding for at least 4 months, and delaying of complementary foods until 4-6 months, prevent the development of allergy ... There is no convincing evidence that maternal manipulation of diet during pregnancy or lactation, use of soy products, or infant dietary restrictions beyond 4-6 months has any effect on the development of atopic disease." (*Curr Opin Pediatr* 2008;20:698-702.)

Speak with your health-care provider about your ideal breastfeeding diet, especially if you have a personal history of or close relationship to someone with nut allergies.



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