

How Do I Address My Child's Food Intolerances or Allergies?

When it comes to childhood nutrition, understanding and managing food allergies and intolerances is essential for parents and caregivers alike.

What is a Food Allergy?

A food allergy is when the immune system mistakenly sees a particular food as dangerous or harmful and triggers an allergic reaction.¹



Types:

1. Non-IgE Mediated Allergies

Symptoms that result from the body's making IgE antibodies in response to a food protein. They cause severe allergic reactions that can be life-threatening if not treated quickly and appropriately with epinephrine (e.g., EpiPen).

2. IgE Mediated Allergies

Occur when other parts of the immune system react to a certain food. Symptoms often involve the digestive tract, including vomiting and diarrhea. Non-IgE-mediated allergies are not life-threatening. Generally, the best way to treat these allergies is to avoid the food that causes them.

Top Food Allergies in Canada²



Shellfish



Egg



Fish



Milk



Mustard



Peanut



Sesame



Soy



Tree nuts



Wheat and triticale



If you suspect your child has a food allergy, it's important to visit their doctor for a referral to an allergist. The allergist will take a patient history, asking about when the suspected reaction occurred, how long it lasted, how it was treated, and whether other family members have allergies.



Kid-Friendly Food Swaps for Common Allergens



- **Dairy:** Switch cow's milk for plant-based milk, such as almond, soy, oat, coconut, or rice milk.



- **Eggs:** When baking, use mashed bananas or applesauce as a binding agent. Tofu can also be used in place of eggs in dishes like scrambles or quiches.



- **Wheat/Gluten:** Use gluten-free flour blends for baking. Substitute wheat pasta with gluten-free alternatives like quinoa or chickpea pasta.



- **Peanuts:** Swap peanut butter for alternatives like almond, cashew, sunflower seed, or soy nut butter.

Can a Child Outgrow a Food Allergy?

According to the Canadian Paediatric Society, your child may outgrow their food allergy, especially if it started before they turned 3. Milk allergies usually go away as your child gets older. However, allergies to nuts and fish usually don't go away.³



What is a Food Intolerance?



What is a Food Intolerance?

A food intolerance differs from a food allergy because it doesn't involve the immune system.

When you have a food intolerance, your digestive system cannot digest certain foods, leading to uncomfortable digestive symptoms.⁴

- Food intolerances can occur in children, with one study in Switzerland indicating that 16% of participants aged between **1 month and 18 years** avoided foods due to intolerance.⁵
- **Lactose intolerance** was found to be the **most frequent intolerance** reported.⁵



Food Intolerances Include:⁶

- Lactose
- Gluten
- Histamine
- Caffeine
- Sulphites
- Salicylates
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- FODMAPs



What to do if your Child has a Food Intolerance

- ➔ Determine which foods your child is intolerant to by keeping a food and symptom diary⁷
- ➔ Trial an elimination diet to determine food triggers (under the supervision of a healthcare professional)
- ➔ Work with a registered dietitian to ensure your child is meeting their nutrient requirements



The symptoms of food intolerance are typically dose-dependent.⁸

The **more of the food** consumed, the **worse the symptoms**.

Food Intolerance Tests

- Tests are available for certain food intolerances, such as lactose intolerance. The most common lactose intolerance test is the **hydrogen breath test**.⁹
- **Food-specific immunoglobulin G (IgG) testing** is becoming increasingly popular for identifying food intolerances. However, this test has yet to be validated or supported by research.¹⁰
- The best way to identify food intolerances is through trial and error or an **elimination diet**.

Do Food Intolerances Ever Go Away?

Some food intolerances can change over time. It's a good idea to re-test foods your child has been avoiding occasionally to see if their tolerance has changed. The tolerance to certain foods improves as your child gets older.

