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In the News

* *Read about a Connecticut desensitization facility by clicking the Patient Links tab on our website*

Peanut Allergy and Desensitization

Food hypersensitivity is an immune reaction to food. It occurs most commonly in young children.

Allergy to peanut presents in early childhood, usually with symptoms of a skin reaction such as a generalized rash appearing within minutes of the child eating the food containing the peanut protein. The rash can be hive-like or resemble eczema. Respiratory, gastrointestinal, cardiac, or rarely, neurologic symptoms, may accompany the skin reaction. Diagnosis is by history and exam at time of reaction, a blood and/or skin testing for the allergic chemical IgE (immunoglobulin E) antibodies to the food protein.

Therapy for peanut allergy has traditionally been avoidance and maintaining self-injectable epinephrine for any reaction. A personalized medical ID bracelet or necklace is recommended to highlight the peanut allergy to emergency responders.

In the past few years, a new technique called desensitization has been developed.

Desensitization can be effective in managing peanut allergy in some cases. The desensitization technique involves giving the allergic patient small amounts of the allergen under close medical supervision. The procedure is still investigative and is usually performed in skilled medical settings following protocol under the approval of an independent research board (IRB) or research committee. Gradually, the amounts of allergen are increased and the patient administers at home until a serving of up to 2 teaspoons is given daily. This daily serving must be maintained and allows the allergic individual to tolerate accidental exposures to peanut. Only a small number of allergic individuals who are desensitized are able to discontinue their daily peanut dose and maintain their tolerance to peanuts. For most allergic individuals, daily administration of peanut protein is required to maintain continued exposure.

Hopefully, as desensitization is perfected, more allergic individuals will be able to tolerate accidental exposure to peanut without life threatening reactions.

By Christopher Randolph, MD



Ask your doctor if peanut allergy desensitization is an option for you or your child

