

FOOD ALLERGIES 101

What is a food allergy?

Food allergy occurs when the immune system mistakenly attacks a food protein. Ingestion of the offending food may trigger the sudden release of chemicals, including histamine, resulting in symptoms of an allergic reaction. A food allergy can be potentially fatal.

What are the common symptoms of a reaction?

Symptoms may include one or more of the following: a tingling sensation in the mouth, swelling of the tongue and the throat, difficulty breathing, hives, vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness, and even death. Symptoms typically appear within minutes to two hours after the person has eaten the food to which he or she is allergic.

Is there a cure for food allergies?

Currently, there are no medications that cure food allergies. Strict avoidance is the only way to prevent a reaction.

What is the best treatment for a food allergy reaction?

Epinephrine, also called adrenaline, is the medication of choice for controlling a severe reaction. It is available by prescription as a self-injectable device (EpiPen[®], Auvi-Q[®] or Adrenaclick[®]).

What is the difference between food allergy and food intolerance?

Many people think the terms *food allergy* and *food intolerance* mean the same thing; however, they do not. Food intolerance, unlike a food allergy, does not involve the immune system and is not life-threatening. Lactose intolerance, trouble digesting the milk sugar lactose, is a common example. Symptoms may include abdominal cramps, bloating and diarrhea.

A food allergy occurs when the immune system reacts to a certain food. The most common form of an immune system reaction occurs when the body creates immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibodies to the food. When these IgE antibodies react with the food, histamine and other chemicals (called “mediators”) are released, causing hives, asthma, or other symptoms of an allergic reaction.