

Hospital Food Challenge

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please speak to a member of staff who can arrange it for you.**

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Hospital Food Challenge

A food challenge is a test that is carried out in hospital to see if your child is allergic to or able to tolerate a particular food. The specialist at the hospital will have already discussed the reason why your child should undertake a food challenge.

The aim of this leaflet is to give you an explanation of what to expect on the day your child attends for a food challenge with the allergy team at Whiston Hospital.

What is a food challenge

A food challenge involves your child eating a certain food, which we suspect your child is allergic to, over a period of time under close supervision on the Children's Observations Unit, (CHOBS).

We start off by giving small amounts of the food and gradually increasing this amount until either a reaction occurs and the challenge is stopped or the top dose has been tolerated without any adverse reaction.

A food challenge can last approximately 4-5 hours.

Why does my child need a food challenge

It is a reliable way of confirming if your child has a food allergy or not.

A food challenge will have been decided upon if allergy tests are inconclusive or if we think your child may have out grown their allergy but has had a significant reaction in the past.

Depending on the outcome, you may be able to introduce the particular food back into their diet.

If the food challenge shows your child is still allergic to that particular food, you should continue to exclude that food from their diet.

What are the risks

All food challenge tests carry the potential risk of provoking an allergic reaction, this is why they are performed in hospital by trained and experienced staff.

Throughout the challenge your child will be closely monitored for any signs of an allergic reaction.

If an allergic reaction did occur the food challenge would be stopped and the relevant medication will be given and your child will be closely monitored.

The risk of anaphylaxis is rare but still a potential, all medication is prescribed and readily available should it be required.

How to prepare your child for the food challenge

Preparing your child for their visit to hospital for the food challenge will help them to understand what is happening and can improve their willingness to co-operate.

Talking to your child in advance will give them the chance to ask any questions or voice any concerns they may have.

The week before the food challenge

- **5 days** before the food challenge **stop** all your child's **antihistamines**.
- Asthma and eczema creams **should not** be stopped.
- If your child has been started on any oral steroid medication please contact us to discuss. **Do not stop them**.
- Your child needs to be fit and well to proceed with the challenge. If your child has a cough, cold, diarrhoea or vomiting or if they have been taking their rescue inhaler more frequently in the week before the challenge then please contact us.

If we need you to bring the challenge food we will discuss this with you prior to the challenge. If you think your child will be reluctant to eat the challenge food you can bring other foods to hide it in (but only foods you know your child can tolerate).

Consider bringing a small treat to use as a reward for after the food challenge.

What will happen on the day of the challenge

Your child can have a light breakfast before coming to the hospital and you can bring a packed lunch.

Please ensure that the breakfast and lunch is their usual choice and not something new. You can bring with you any small toys, games, books etc in order to provide some distractions for your child to keep them entertained as food challenges are a long process.

On arrival your child will be seen by a nurse specialist who will ensure your child is fit and well to carry out the food challenge.

We will weigh your child and take their observations, temperature, pulse and blood pressure. We will also document any rashes on your child's skin.

We will then commence the food challenge which will involve giving increasing amounts of the food every 15 minutes then assessing your child before the next dose, including taking their pulse and blood pressure and observing for any signs of an allergic reaction.

If your child has a reaction at any stage the challenge will be stopped and appropriate treatment given.

Your child must remain on the ward throughout the challenge and will need to stay for 1 hour post completion of the food challenge.

If they have an allergic reaction they may need to stay longer or possibly require an overnight admission.

After the food challenge

If your child passes the food challenge you should no longer avoid the food challenged and this can be introduced back into their diet, beginning the day after the food challenge and should be eaten weekly.

Our team will make a telephone follow up appointment with you on the day of the food challenge for a progress review 8 weeks post food challenge to check on progress after introducing the food challenged back into your child's diet.

If your child fails the food challenge you should continue to avoid the food challenged. This will be discussed further prior to discharge.

If your child refuses to eat the tested food, despite our efforts the advice would be to continue strict avoidance of that food, this would be discussed further prior to discharge.

If within 48 hours of the food challenge, your child shows signs of an allergic reaction please treat as appropriate and seek medical attention if necessary and inform our team.

If you require any further information please contact:

Respiratory and Allergy Team - 0151 430 1938 / 07584143785

Special thanks to the Allergy Team at Wythenshawe hospital and Alder hey Children's hospital for sharing information within this leaflet

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