

Food Allergies in Babies & young children

Introducing foods that could trigger allergy

When you start introducing solid foods to your baby from around 6 months old, introduce the foods that can trigger allergic reactions one at a time and in very small amounts so that you can spot any reaction. If your baby already has an allergy, such as a diagnosed food allergy or eczema, or if you have a family history of food allergies, eczema, asthma or hay fever, you may need to be particularly careful when introducing foods. Talk to your GP or health visitor first.

Foods that can trigger an allergic reaction are:

- cows' milk
- eggs (eggs without a red lion stamp should not be eaten raw or lightly cooked)
- foods that contain gluten, including wheat, barley and rye
- nuts and peanuts (serve them crushed or ground)
- seeds (serve them crushed or ground)
- soya
- shellfish (do not serve raw or lightly cooked)
- fish

These foods can be introduced from around 6 months as part of your baby's diet, just like any other foods.

Once introduced and if tolerated, these foods should become part of your baby's usual diet to minimise the risk of allergy.

Evidence has shown that delaying the introduction of peanut and hen's eggs beyond 6 to 12 months may increase the risk of developing an allergy to these foods.

Lots of children outgrow their allergies to milk or eggs, but a peanut allergy is generally lifelong.

If your child has a food allergy, read food labels carefully. Avoid foods if you're not sure whether they contain the food your child is allergic to.

How to tell if your child has a food allergy

Allergic reactions usually happen quickly within a few minutes of exposure to an allergen.

They can cause:

- sneezing
- a runny or blocked nose
- red, itchy, watery eyes
- wheezing and coughing
- a red, itchy rash
- worsening of asthma or eczema symptoms

Most allergic reactions are mild, but occasionally a severe reaction called anaphylaxis or anaphylactic shock can occur.

This is a medical emergency and needs urgent treatment.

Do not be tempted to experiment by cutting out a major food, such as milk, because this could lead to your child not getting the nutrients they need.

Talk to your health visitor or GP, who may refer you to a registered dietitian.

