

THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

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NEWSLETTER

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Take the tricks out of treats and keep your little pumpkin safe!

Halloween can be a tricky time for the growing number of children who have food allergies. The scary parts of Halloween are supposed to involve ghosts and witches, not the treats!

According to the Kids with Food Allergies Foundation, today one in 17 children are affected by allergies to foods such as milk, peanuts and tree nuts, ingredients commonly found in candy. Peanut allergy, among the most common life threatening allergies, has doubled in frequency within the last five years. As the number of food-allergic children continues to rise, more and more parents are challenged with keeping their own kids and their neighbors' children safe this Halloween.

We would like to offer some Halloween tips to keep all of our gremlins, ghosts, and ghouls safe to enjoy another Halloween celebration next year. Here are some Halloween suggestions for parents with food allergic children:

- Purchase a variety of candy, including some that does not include any milk, soy, or peanuts. Read labels carefully as some ingredients may be hidden. Check all ingredients and remember that treat-sized candy may have different ingredients or be manufactured on different machinery than their full-sized counterparts.
- Consider having non-food item treats on hand such as stickers, fun pencils, small toys or even coins for the child's piggybank.
- Plan an alternate activity such as going to the movies, a slumber party or have a safe treat scavenger hunt.
- When trick-or-treating, carry your child's emergency medicine, bring sani-wipes with you and carry safe snacks for your child to enjoy during this time.
- Give neighbors safe Halloween treats in advance to hand to your food allergic child.
- Prepare a container filled with safe treats in advance, and then swap it for the treats collected.
- Try a variation of the "Tooth Fairy" and leave the unsafe candy for the "Candy Fairy" who exchanges it for a small gift, toy or money.

- If your child is older, have him or her trade unsafe treats for safe ones with their friends.
- If possible, donate leftover candy to children who may not be able to go out and trick or treat.
- For school parties, you may want to speak to your child's teacher in advance and make some suggestions or provide safe snacks. You also may want consider attending the classroom party so you can monitor the situation, but remember your child's emotional needs and be careful about drawing unnecessary attention to his or her food allergies.

Food allergies can be life altering, but not always life long.

Food allergy symptoms can range from mild to life-threatening. The most common symptoms of a food-allergic reaction include hives, itchy rash, swelling, itching, tingling, swelling of the lips, tongue, or mouth, vomiting, abdominal cramps, or diarrhea. Other symptoms may include coughing, trouble breathing, wheezing, drop in blood pressure, or loss of consciousness. Though most symptoms occur within minutes of eating the allergy causing food, reactions can present up to two to four hours later. The specific type of symptoms that occur during a food-allergic reaction can be hard to predict. In addition, what may initially appear to be a mild reaction may quickly turn more severe and dangerous.

Having a child with food allergies means constant anxiety, vigilance, planning, and limitations on family activities. Additionally, it gives a child the feeling of being "different" which can cause social stresses throughout their school years and into their adulthood and sometimes lead them to feel stigmatized. The unfortunate reality is that there is presently no proven cure, other than avoidance of these food allergens. However, many investigational studies are showing that oral and sublingual desensitization, similar to the very effective technique used for airborne allergens such as pollen and dust, will eventually be an excellent treatment for many patients with food allergy.

Placing restrictions on your diet throughout your lifetime can be difficult and can give you a sense of anxiety about eating outside of your

own environment as well as an uneasiness about trying new foods. Statistics show that 80% of children outgrow some food allergies such as eggs, milk, soy and wheat. Peanut allergies, however, have a lower chance of being outgrown, at 20%.

Food allergies have increased substantially over the past decade, leading many parents to institute dietary restrictions for their children. However, it should be noted that serious food allergies are often over diagnosed. In addition to over diagnoses, many children outgrow their food allergy and their parents are not being made aware of it.

Our new associate physician, Dr. June Zhang, has a special interest in this area and brings to our group her expertise in assessing whether our patients must continue to restrict their diets. A procedure called "Oral Food Challenge" is currently being offered at our clinic. The goal for this procedure is to determine whether the patient needs to avoid the food in question or if they have outgrown their allergy to a particular food(s). Knowing that you have outgrown a particular food allergy can provide a better quality of life, give you the ability to open up your diet without restrictions and relieve any stigma you may feel. Being made aware that you no longer have an allergy to a particular food can be a life long relief and provide the pleasure of knowing that you or your child can live more freely and enjoy foods you have missed throughout the years.

When properly conducted, Oral Food Challenges are safe. Dr. Zhang has her patients go through a series of simple screenings first to determine whether she is confident the patient will safely pass the food challenge testing level.

If you or a loved one have experienced a reaction to certain foods in the past and/or have been told that there is a food allergy concern and you would like to know if you have outgrown your allergy to these foods, please contact our office and set up an appointment to meet with Dr. Zhang and discuss it with her. Dr. June Zhang's credentials include board certifications in both Pediatrics and Allergy and Immunology and she is here to help you. Wouldn't it be a relief to know that you no longer have to avoid certain foods for the remainder of your life?