

THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

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NEWSLETTER

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FOOD ALLERGIES ARE ON THE RISE IN THE UNITED STATES

Food allergies are up 18% over the last decade, the CDC (Center for Disease Control) reports.

Four out of every 100 U.S. kids under age 18 now suffer from food allergies, which double their risk of developing asthma and triple their risk of developing skin or respiratory allergies.

"It is a significant trend -- food allergies do appear to be continuously increasing over the decade," says CDC health statistician Amy Barnum, MSPH. "And if you look at hospital discharges with any diagnosis related to food allergy, there has been a significant increase."

The new CDC data confirms what pediatricians and allergists have been suspecting, says Hugh Sampson, MD, director of the Jaffe Food Allergy Institute at Mount Sinai Hospital, New York. "There was the impression food allergy is increasing in children, but we only had data on peanut allergy... This report shows it is food allergy in general. That goes along with what a lot of pediatric allergists and pediatricians have been thinking."

Eight types of food account for 90% of food allergies, the CDC finds:

Eggs—Fish—Milk--Peanuts

Shellfish—Soy—Tree Nuts--Wheat

Why are more and more American kids allergic to foods? Nobody knows for sure, Dr. Sampson says. But one clue comes from the fact that peanut allergies are up not just in the U.S., but in other nations that eat the same way we do.

"This seems to be primarily a phenomenon of Westernized countries, among people who have our kind of lifestyle and our kind of

diet. You don't see similar things in countries in Asia or in Africa."

For example, Dr. Sampson says, children in China eat just as much peanut-based food as U.S. children do. But peanut allergy is almost unheard of in China. "We eat peanuts dry roasted, and they eat them boiled or fried... The high temperature of dry roasting does make peanuts accrue changes that that make them more allergenic", that is, more likely to cause allergy.

Most food allergies develop early in life. Milk and egg allergies tend to occur before a child's first birthday. Dr. Sampson suggests that the CDC numbers -- based on food allergies in the last year in kids up to 18 years old -- may actually underestimate the prevalence of food allergies in very young children.

"There was a study suggesting that 6% to 8% of kids up to age 3 years had some form of food allergy. Then by age 10 it drops down to about 4%, which corresponds with the number the CDC has come up with," Sampson notes.

Food allergy is different from food intolerance. An allergic reaction is abnormal immune response to what should be a harmless substance. Food intolerance is the inability to digest or to metabolize food.

Dr. Sampson says children who develop food allergies usually get a skin rash or hives. With more severe cases, there may be vomiting or difficulty breathing. A child with food intolerance usually has a stomachache, bloating, and/or diarrhea.

Food allergies can be very serious. "I would never ignore a rash. At a minimum, contact a pediatrician," (or your family doctor) advises Dr. Sampson. "And we know that children who develop a milk allergy are at risk

of another allergy. We see that kids with milk allergy get other allergic symptoms, like asthma, much more often than kids without food allergies."

Indeed, the CDC finds:

* 29% of kids with food allergies, but only 12% of kids without food allergies, also have asthma.

* 27% of kids with food allergies, but only 8% of kids without food allergies, also have eczema or skin allergy.

* More than 30% of kids with food allergies, but only 9% of kids without food allergies, also have respiratory allergies.

So what's the solution? We know allergies run in families and we also know that people that develop one type of allergy are more likely to develop other allergies in the future. If you or a loved one seems to be experiencing an abnormal reaction to something you eat, don't ignore it. Rather, contact our office and speak with one of our experienced medical staff. Allergists are the best qualified professionals to diagnose a food allergy. We can perform allergy testing to help you determine if food allergies are causing your symptoms. And, if food allergy is present, we can help you with a treatment plan designed to keep you healthy and allergy free.

Remember:

* The best treatment is to identify and avoid the foods that cause your reaction. Read food labels carefully and ask about ingredients at restaurants or when eating food prepared by another person.

* Be prepared. Have an action plan on what to do in case you or a loved one accidentally eat a food to which you (they) are allergic.

Don't suffer in silence; let us help you diagnose and treat your food allergies.