

# Food Allergy Basics for All Ages

This handout provides general information and tips for managing food allergies. Speak with your child's allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child's food allergy management plan.

**There is a lot of new information to learn when your child is diagnosed with a food allergy. It is normal for parents to feel overwhelmed at times. This handout was designed to be a resource you can refer back to over time. You can also read the Food Allergy Stages handout for your child's age for specific tips for managing food allergies at their stage of development. As you learn more about food allergy management, you will feel more confident and develop routines that work for your family!**



## Definitions

**Allergen:** An allergen is something (usually a protein) that causes an allergic reaction, such as something in food or the environment. For someone with a food allergy to peanut, peanut is an allergen.

**Allergic reaction:** Symptoms of an allergic reaction usually happen between a few minutes and two hours after exposure to a food. The most common symptoms involve the skin (e.g., hives, redness, or itching), respiratory symptoms (e.g., trouble breathing, hoarse voice, or wheezing), and gastrointestinal or gut symptoms (e.g., vomiting or diarrhea). Symptoms can occur by themselves or in combination, such as skin rash and trouble breathing. Reactions can range from mild to severe and symptoms can be different each time.

**Anaphylaxis:** Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that can be life threatening, with symptoms such as difficulty breathing or feeling dizzy and passing out. Any time two body systems are involved, for example the skin (hives) and gut (vomiting), that is also anaphylaxis.

**Epinephrine:** Epinephrine is a safe medicine that works quickly to stop an allergic reaction, including anaphylaxis.

**Epinephrine auto-injector:** An auto-injector is the device used to treat anaphylaxis by giving a dose of epinephrine into the thigh muscle. Generics and several brands are available, such as EpiPen®, Auvi-Q®, and Adrenaclick®. Symjepi™ also gives a dose of epinephrine, but uses a pre-filled syringe instead of an auto-injector.

**Anaphylaxis Action Plan:** The Anaphylaxis Action Plan (sometimes called the Emergency Care Plan or Food Allergy Action Plan) is a document developed with your child's allergist. The plan lists your child's food allergies and gives important information about symptoms of an allergic reaction, how to treat a reaction, and how to get emergency help.

**Cross-contact:** Cross-contact can happen when a food allergen accidentally touches safe food. For example, slicing an apple on a cutting board after slicing cheese (without cleaning it first) could pose a risk of cross-contact for someone with an allergy to milk.



## Managing Food Allergies at Home

- Your family will decide whether to keep your child's allergens in your home. This may depend on your child's age, how common the allergen is in food items, and dietary needs of other family members.
- Set family rules, such as:
  - No sharing food, drinks, dishware, cups, or utensils.
  - Hand-washing before and after eating.
  - Eating is only allowed in specific areas of the home (e.g., kitchen, dining table).
- Keep a copy of the Anaphylaxis Action Plan clearly posted (e.g., on the refrigerator).
- Make sure everyone knows where epinephrine auto-injectors are stored in the house.

### TO AVOID CROSS-CONTACT AT HOME:

- Wash your hands before preparing and feeding food to your child.
- Use separate serving utensils for foods with and without allergens.
- Clean counters and table tops with soap and water or commercial cleaners.
- Use clean cutting boards, pots/pans, and utensils to prepare your child's food.
- Clean cooking surfaces such as microwaves, toaster ovens, and grills, or use foil or a grill pan for ovens/grills.
- Store food containing allergens away from safe food to avoid spills and confusion.

## Eating Out at Restaurants

- Eating out can be a positive experience with advanced planning. Visit the restaurant's website to see the menu and allergy policy or call ahead and speak with the manager.
- Visit new restaurants at off-peak hours to allow enough time for questions.
- Bring safe food with you when possible to ensure a safe option.
- Bring wipes to clean surfaces if needed (e.g., table, chairs/high chairs/boosters).
- Always have your child's epinephrine auto-injector. Do not eat without it.
- Tell restaurant staff that your child has a food allergy. Speak with someone in charge like the manager or chef, in addition to the server. Be clear this is not just being picky.
- Ask how food is prepared. Inform staff about cross-contact risks and hidden ingredients. Give examples for your child's allergens (e.g., cooking fries in the same oil as fish is a cross-contact risk for someone with an allergy to fish).
- Consider carrying a "chef card" that lists your child's allergens.
- It is okay to ask for a new dish if there is a mistake or to leave if you don't think the restaurant can prepare food that is safe for your child.



## Educating Other Caregivers

- Food allergies may be new to many people. Plan to teach other caregivers in advance to make the experience safe and positive for everyone. Make sure to leave time for questions.
- Make sure that all people caring for your child understand how to read an ingredient label and safely prepare/serve food to avoid cross-contact. Consider preparing your child's food ahead of time.
- Review your child's Anaphylaxis Action Plan with the caregiver. Make sure they can recognize an allergic reaction and have them practice with an epinephrine auto-injector trainer.
- Make sure caregivers have your contact information and can call 911 in an emergency.
- Be clear that everyone caring for your child needs to follow their food allergy management plan. "Food allergies are serious, because eating even a little bit of the food can make my child very sick. The good news is that the plan our allergist gave us works very well. When we all follow the same plan, it helps keep her safe and makes her feel confident."



## Managing Food Allergies at Childcare and School

- Before your child starts childcare/school each year, schedule a meeting with staff to learn about their food allergy management policies and discuss your child's needs.
- Provide the childcare/school with your child's Anaphylaxis Action Plan and epinephrine auto-injectors. Make sure staff know how to recognize and treat an allergic reaction.
- Identify where emergency medication will be stored (e.g., director's office, nurse's office, classroom) and who will be allowed to administer medication.
- If your child will be eating food provided by the childcare/school, find out how to review the menu and read ingredient labels ahead of time. Make sure staff know how to read labels.
- Find out if there is a designated table for children with food allergies in the classroom/lunchroom.
- Consider whether the classroom can be allergen-free. If food is eaten in the classroom, recommend hand-washing with soap and water or wipes after meals/snacks.
- Make sure your child can wash their hands before eating.
- Recommend a "no sharing food" policy.
- Clearly label your child's food and water bottles/bottles/sippy cups.
- Avoid use of food in art projects, science experiments, and rewards/incentives.
- Recommend non-food treats for celebrations (e.g., special prize for the birthday child).
- Plan for field trips (e.g., availability of safe food, who will carry/administer medication).
- If your child takes the bus, request a no eating food policy and make a plan for emergencies.

## Navigating Social Activities

- Children with food allergies can be involved in social activities! Some activities may require advanced planning to ensure that your child has safe foods to eat and that there is a plan to recognize and treat allergic reactions.
- Bring safe food with you or time activities so that they can be food-free.
- Always bring your child's epinephrine auto-injector, even if your child will not be eating.
- Host activities in your home or a place that does not have food (e.g., a playground) when possible to make things easier and safer.
- When others are hosting, talk to the host about your child's food allergies ahead of time. Find out whether the food that is served will be safe for your child.
- Freeze a supply of safe treats to have available for birthday parties and celebrations.
- If you will be leaving your child with other adults (e.g., drop-off party or play date), follow guidelines for Educating Other Caregivers.
- Consider having your child wear medical identification jewelry listing their food allergies.

## Managing Your Stress and Anxiety and Feeling Confident

- It is common for parents to experience stress or worry when their child is diagnosed with a food allergy. Remember that the routines you follow to manage food allergies work well.
- Ask your child's allergist when you have questions about your child's food allergies. Having the facts will help you feel more confident and keep your child safe.
- Support groups led by professionals who work with children with food allergies (e.g. nurse, allergist, nutritionist, mental health provider) can help reduce stress/anxiety.
- Talk to your child's allergist or your own doctor if you are having a hard time managing stress or worries about your child's allergies. Mental health professionals can help parents cope with stress and anxiety related to a child's medical condition.

The following Food Allergy Stages handouts provide specific recommendations and tips for managing food allergies at different ages:

**Baby** (0-12 months)  
**Toddler** (1-3 years)  
**Preschool** (3-5 years)  
**Early Grade School** (5-8 years)

**Late Grade School** (8-11 years)  
**Early Teen** (11-14 years)  
**Late Teen** (14-18 years)  
**Young Adult** (18-21 years)

## Resources for Further Information

Please note that website links may change. (Links last accessed 7/8/2022)

### PROFESSIONAL AND PATIENT SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

- American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)
- American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (ACAAI) [www.acaai.org](http://www.acaai.org)
- Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) [www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org)
- Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE) [www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org)
- Kids with Food Allergies (KFA) [www.kidswithfoodallergies.org](http://www.kidswithfoodallergies.org)
- American Partnership for Eosinophilic Disorders (APFED) [www.apfed.org](http://www.apfed.org)
- The FPIES Foundation [www.fpiesfoundation.org](http://www.fpiesfoundation.org)
- International FPIES Association (I-FPIES) [www.fpies.org](http://www.fpies.org)

### LABEL READING

- Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 Questions and Answers [www.fda.gov/food/food-allergensgluten-free-guidance-documents-regulatory-information/food-allergen-labeling-and-consumer-protection-act-2004-questions-and-answers](http://www.fda.gov/food/food-allergensgluten-free-guidance-documents-regulatory-information/food-allergen-labeling-and-consumer-protection-act-2004-questions-and-answers)

### RECOGNIZING AND TREATING ALLERGIC REACTIONS

- Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Food Allergy in the United States: Summary for Patients, Families, and Caregivers [www.niaid.nih.gov/sites/default/files/faguidelinespatient.pdf](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/sites/default/files/faguidelinespatient.pdf)
- AAAAI Anaphylaxis Emergency Action Plan <https://www.aaaai.org/Aaaai/media/Media-Library-PDFs/Tools%20for%20the%20Public/Allergy,%20Asthma,%20Immunology%20Glossary/Anaphylaxis-Emergency-Action-Plan.pdf>
- AAAAI Anaphylaxis Overview, Symptoms, Treatment and Management, articles and quiz <https://www.aaaai.org/Conditions-Treatments/Allergies/Anaphylaxis>
- AAAAI Food Allergy Overview, Symptoms, Treatment and Management, articles and quiz <https://www.aaaai.org/Conditions-Treatments/Allergies/Food-Allergy>

### MANAGING FOOD ALLERGIES IN CHILD CARE AND SCHOOL

- CDC Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Program [www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/pdf/20\\_316712-A\\_FA\\_guide\\_508tag.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/pdf/20_316712-A_FA_guide_508tag.pdf)
- AAAAI School Tools <https://www.aaaai.org/Tools-for-the-Public/School-Tools>

### OTHER EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

- Jaffe Food Allergy Institute video on Diagnosing and Avoiding Food Allergens [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAW6Oo8k\\_b8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAW6Oo8k_b8)
- Jaffe Food Allergy Institute video on Recognizing and Treating Anaphylaxis [www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCKSUzZHmq8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCKSUzZHmq8)
- Allergy Ready [www.allergyready.com](http://www.allergyready.com)
- Living Confidently with Food Allergy: A Guide for Parents and Families [www.allergyhome.org/handbook/](http://www.allergyhome.org/handbook/)

### FOOD ASSISTANCE AND OTHER REDUCED COST PROGRAMS

- [www.findhelp.org](http://www.findhelp.org)
- [www.211.org](http://www.211.org)
- [www.foodequalityinitiative.org](http://www.foodequalityinitiative.org)

# Baby (0–12 months)

The Food Allergy Stages handouts were designed to help families manage food allergies at different developmental stages.

- Use the *Food Allergy Basics for All Ages* handout to learn about important information all parents should know when they have a child with food allergies.
- Always speak with your child’s allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child’s food allergy management plan.



**For very young children, parents and other caregivers are in charge of food allergy management. It is common for parents to feel overwhelmed, frustrated, or worried at times when a child is first diagnosed with a food allergy. As you learn more about managing food allergies, you will feel more confident and will develop routines that help keep your child healthy and safe.**

### Allergen Exposure

- Young children put their hands and objects in their mouths. Allergens can get into the mouth this way. You can reduce the risk of an allergic reaction by:
  - Keeping food containing allergens out of reach (including siblings’ cups or bottles).
  - Washing your child’s hands with soap and water or wipes before and after eating.

### Recognizing and Treating an Allergic Reaction

- For young children, sudden changes in behavior can be signs of an allergic reaction. These can include crankiness, crying that can’t be soothed, tiredness or sleepiness beyond what is expected or routine, lack of interest in playing, or clinginess.

### Managing Food Allergies at Home

- Make sure that older siblings understand important rules, such as not sharing food and washing hands before and after they eat.
- Vacuum and clean floors regularly, as babies may find food on the ground.
- Consider buying allergen-free pet food and treats, as babies may put these in their mouths.
- Remember to keep epinephrine auto-injectors out of reach of young children.

### Eating Out at Restaurants

- Bring wipes to clean eating surfaces and high chairs/boosters to get rid of allergens.

## Managing Food Allergies at Childcare

- If the childcare will be providing some or all of your child's food, ask to read ingredient labels ahead of time and find out whether there are menu alternatives for your child.
- Make sure staff know how to read ingredient labels for your child's allergies.
- Make sure staff understand if your child needs a special formula.
- Provide a supply of ready-to-eat snacks for your child in case extra food is needed.
- Find out how staff monitor meals. Make sure your child cannot grab others children's food.
- Remind staff to wash their own hands after feeding children or eating their own meals.
- Be aware of allergens in some art projects, sensory tables, Play-Doh, and paint.



## Navigating Social Activities

- Make sure that other adults and children know they should not offer food to your child.
- Provide close supervision on playgrounds and other social settings where your child may grab food or well-meaning strangers may offer food.
- Carry wipes to clean surfaces and hand wipes if soap and water will not be available.
- Consider using a diaper bag to keep your child's epinephrine auto-injector, Anaphylaxis Action Plan, and wipes with you at all times.
- Watch out for objects such as sucking toys or surfaces that may have leftover food on them. Clean your child's mouth with water and their hands with wipes or soap and water if you think they touched a surface with an allergen on it.

## Preparing for Medical Visits

- Even young children will take cues from parents on how to react in new or stressful situations. When you are positive and calm, this provides comfort to your child.
- Use distraction or soothing strategies (e.g., rattle toy, singing to the child, sucking on a pacifier) to help with visits or procedures.
- Bring toys and comfort items with you for longer visits or procedures.
- Contact your allergist's office if you have questions about what to expect during the visit or procedure (e.g., first visit to the allergist, skin testing, food challenge).

See the **Food Allergy Stages Toddler** handout for questions about managing food allergies as your baby gets older.

# Toddler (1–3 years)

The Food Allergy Stages handouts were designed to help families manage food allergies at different developmental stages.

- Use the *Food Allergy Basics for All Ages* handout to learn about important information all parents should know when they have a child with food allergies.
- Always speak with your child’s allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child’s food allergy management plan.



**Toddlers are active, curious, and need careful monitoring. They pay attention to what adults do and learn by imitation and play. When you follow consistent food allergy management routines, children will learn this is an important part of daily life.**

### Teaching Children about Food Allergy

- Your toddler will pick up on your cues about coping with food allergy. When your words and behaviors show you are confident, this will help your child feel more confident too.
- Toddlers can start to understand simple rules and routines, such as washing hands before and after eating. However, they cannot yet be expected to follow rules on their own.
- When teaching your child about food allergies, speak with them in the same way that you talk about other safety issues, like looking both ways before crossing the street. Use a calm tone and focus on safety routines.
- Use simple terms like “safe”/“not safe” or “milk can make you sick.”
- As your child’s vocabulary starts to grow, you can teach them the names of their food allergens. You can also teach them using photos, pictures, or toy food.

### Allergen Exposure

- Toddlers put their hands and objects in their mouths. Allergens can get into the mouth this way. You can reduce the risk of an allergic reaction by:
  - Keeping food containing allergens out of reach (including siblings’ cups or bottles).
  - Washing your child’s hands with soap and water or wipes before and after eating.
- Teach your child about washing hands before and after eating. Use a song to make it fun and model how long to wash (e.g., sing “Happy Birthday” twice).

### Label Reading

- Explain routines out loud so that children will learn they are important. “We read the label, so we know there are no eggs in these cookies. They are safe for you to eat.”



# Food Allergy Stages: Toddler (1–3 years)



## Recognizing and Treating an Allergic Reaction

- Be aware that sudden changes in behavior can be signs of an allergic reaction. These can include crankiness, crying that can't be soothed, tiredness or sleepiness beyond what is expected or routine, lack of interest in playing, or clinginess.
- Toddlers may use different words to describe symptoms, such as “a funny feeling in my mouth,” that food tastes “spicy,” or that their mouth feels “hot” or like there is something “stuck” in it.

## Managing Food Allergies at Home

- Start to teach rules such as only eating food served by a caregiver.
- Make sure that older siblings understand important rules, such as not sharing food and washing hands before and after they eat.
- Store allergens out of reach of curious hands.
- Vacuum and clean floors regularly, as young children may find food on the ground.
- Consider allergen-free pet food and treats, as toddlers may put these in their mouths.
- Keep epinephrine auto-injectors out of reach of young children.
- Explain routines out loud. “We have our medicine bag, so now we can go to the park!”

## Eating Out at Restaurants

- Bring wipes to clean eating surfaces and high chairs/boosters to get rid of allergens.
- Include older toddlers in communicating at restaurants. You can practice ahead of time through play. “I have food allergies.”

## Managing Food Allergies at Childcare and School

- If the childcare/school will be providing some or all of your child's food, ask to read ingredient labels ahead of time and find out whether there are menu alternatives for your child.
- Make sure staff know how to read ingredient labels for your child's allergies.
- Provide a supply of ready-to-eat snacks for your child in case extra food is needed.
- Find out how staff monitor meals. Make sure your child cannot grab other children's food.
- Remind staff to wash their own hands before and after feeding children or eating their own meals.
- Be aware of allergens in some art projects, sensory tables, Play-Doh, and paint.
- Send in a children's book about food allergies for the teacher to read at story time.



## Navigating Social Activities

- Make sure that other adults and children know they should not offer food to your child.
- Provide close supervision on playgrounds and other social settings where your child may grab food or well-meaning strangers may offer food.
- Carry wipes to clean surfaces and hand wipes if soap and water will not be available.
- Teach children not to share food. You can practice language with older toddlers directly or through play. “No, thank you,” or “I have allergies.”
- Consider having your child wear a medical identification bracelet. Prompt your child to show it to other children and adults. This builds the habit of teaching others about their food allergies. There are colorful plastic options that are well-liked by younger children.

## Supporting Children’s Self-Esteem

- Help older toddlers label feelings. “It seems like you are mad you can’t eat what your brother is eating. Let’s find a food you enjoy that is safe for you.”
- Read children’s books about food allergy to show that other children have allergies too.
- Give simple choices to increase your child’s sense of control. “Daddy brought snacks to the park. Would you like the crackers or the fruit?”
- Praise your child for following routines. “Great job washing your hands before you eat!”



## Preparing Children for Medical Visits

- Even young children will take cues from parents on how to react in new or stressful situations. When you are positive and calm, this provides comfort to your child.
- Older toddlers (close to 3 years) can be told about a medical visit the same day. They may benefit from medical play in the days prior to the visit (e.g., parents and children examining dolls and stuffed animals using a toy medical kit).
- Use distraction and soothing strategies to help with medical procedures such as skin tests, blood tests, and food challenges. Examples include watching a favorite video, reading a book, blowing bubbles or a pinwheel, or hugging a blanket or stuffed toy.

See the **Food Allergy Stages Preschool** handout for questions about managing food allergies as your toddler gets older.

# Preschool (3–5 years)

The Food Allergy Stages handouts were designed to help families manage food allergies at different developmental stages.

- Use the *Food Allergy Basics for All Ages* handout to learn about important information all parents should know when they have a child with food allergies.
- Always speak with your child's allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child's food allergy management plan.



**During the preschool years, children work on developing a sense of control and independence. You can start to involve them in food allergy management in simple ways. When you are consistent with daily routines, children will learn what to expect.**



### Teaching Children about Food Allergy

- Preschoolers can understand simple rules and routines (e.g., washing hands before and after eating, no sharing food). However, they cannot be expected to follow rules on their own.
- When teaching your child about food allergies, speak with them in the same way that you talk about other safety issues, like looking both ways before crossing the street. Use a calm tone and focus on safety routines.
- Use simple explanations such as “You are allergic to eggs. Eggs can make you sick.” Or, “This food is safe for you. It has no eggs.”
- Teach your child the names of their food allergens. You can also teach them what the foods look like using photos, pictures, or during trips to the grocery store.



### Allergen Exposure

- Use a song to teach how long to wash hands and make it fun (e.g., sing “Happy Birthday” twice).
- Teach your child not to share food, cups, or other tableware. “We can’t share food, because we don’t know if other people’s food is safe for you.”

### Label Reading

- Explain routines out loud. “Let me read the label to see if this cookie has nuts.” Or, “The label says there is no milk in this bread, so it is safe for you.”
- Consider using sight word cards with allergen names and pictures to help your child learn the spelling of their allergens.

### Recognizing and Treating an Allergic Reaction

- Be aware that sudden changes in behavior can be signs of an allergic reaction. These can include crankiness, crying that can’t be soothed, tiredness or sleepiness beyond what is expected or routine, lack of interest in playing, or clinginess.
- Preschoolers may use words like “a funny feeling in my mouth,” that food tastes “spicy,” or that their mouth feels “hot” or like there is something “stuck” in it.
- Teach your child what to do in emergencies. “If you feel sick or think you ate peanuts, tell a grown-up. We have medicine that can help you feel better.”
- Build comfort with the epinephrine auto-injector through supervised medical play with a training device (e.g., helping a stuffed animal feel better). You can act out how you would know the stuffed animal was having a reaction and how to tell an adult. Make sure your child understands not to play with their actual auto-injector.



### Managing Food Allergies at Home

- Set rules such as only eating food served by a caregiver. Let your child know they should always check with you before eating a food if they are not sure if it is safe.
- Store allergens out of reach of curious hands.
- Make sure that older siblings understand important rules, such as not sharing food and washing hands before and after they eat.
- Talk about routines you follow before you leave the house. “Let’s use the bathroom, grab your coat, and make sure we have your allergy medicine.”

# Food Allergy Stages: Preschool (3–5 years)

## Eating Out at Restaurants

- Include your child in communicating at restaurants. You can practice ahead of time through play. “I have food allergies.”

## Managing Food Allergies at Childcare and School

- Provide a supply of ready-to-eat snacks for your child in case extra food is needed.
- Find out how staff monitor meals. Make sure your child cannot grab other children’s food.
- Be aware of allergens in some art projects, sensory tables, Play-Doh, and paint.
- Send in a children’s book about food allergies for the teacher to read at story time.
- Make sure your child knows the trusted adults who can give them food at school.



## Supporting Your Child’s Self-Esteem

- Preschoolers may start to notice differences from other children and family members or feel frustrated when they cannot eat something. This is normal.
- If your child is upset, listen first and help them label their feelings. “It seems like you are mad you can’t eat the pizza. Let’s find a food you enjoy that is safe for you.”
- Read children’s books about food allergy to show that other kids have food allergies too.
- Praise your child for following routines. “Great job checking if the cake is safe for you!” This will both encourage them to continue following these routines and help them feel more confident that they can manage their allergies.

## Navigating Social Activities

- Keep a supply of safe treats to have available for birthday parties and celebrations.
- Provide close supervision on playgrounds or other settings where others may offer food.
- Carry wipes to clean surfaces and hand wipes if soap and water will not be available.
- Teach your child not to share food. “No thank you, I have allergies.”
- Prepare your child ahead of time that they may not be able to eat the food that is served at a party. Give them two to three choices of a safe treat to bring along.
- Consider having your child wear a medical identification bracelet. Prompt your child to show it to other children and adults. This builds the habit of teaching others about their food allergies. There are colorful plastic options that are well-liked by younger children.

## Managing Anxiety and Feeling Confident

- Your child will pick up on your cues about coping with food allergy. When your words and behaviors show you are confident, this will help your child feel more confident too.
- If your child seems worried about food allergies (e.g., refusing safe foods, only eating when you are present), talk with your child’s allergist or primary care provider. Mental health professionals can help families cope with anxiety related to a child’s medical condition.

## Preparing Children for Medical Visits

- Preschoolers can be told about a medical visit the same day. They may benefit from medical play in the days prior to the visit (e.g., examining dolls with a toy medical kit, or giving a stuffed animal a skin test).
- Use distraction and soothing strategies to help with medical procedures such as skin tests, blood tests, and food challenges. Examples include watching a favorite video, reading a book, blowing bubbles or a pinwheel, or hugging a blanket or stuffed toy.
- If your child is nervous, plan for a small reward immediately after the visit.

**See the Food Allergy Stages *Early Grade School* handout for questions about managing food allergies as your child gets older.**

# Early Grade School (5–8 years)

The Food Allergy Stages handouts were designed to help families manage food allergies at different developmental stages.

- Use the *Food Allergy Basics for All Ages* handout to learn about important information all parents should know when they have a child with food allergies.
- Always speak with your child's allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child's food allergy management plan.



**School-aged children can understand more about food allergies and follow simple safety rules. This is a good age to involve your child in food allergy management with your supervision. Involving children helps to build their skills and confidence.**

### Teaching Children about Food Allergy

- Teach your child about food allergies in the same way you talk about other safety issues, like looking both ways before crossing the street. “Eggs can make you sick. We read labels and keep your medicine with us because these strategies work really well to keep you safe.”
- Avoid scary words such as “life-threatening allergies.”
- Teach children the names of their food allergens. You can teach them what the foods look like using photos, pictures, or during trips to the grocery store.

### Allergen Exposure

- Reinforce hand washing before eating and how long to wash (e.g., sing the ABCs twice).
- Teach your child that just being near or smelling an allergen does not cause a reaction. If allergen gets on their skin, they should wash it off. Skin keeps allergens out of the body!

### Label Reading

- Teach your child why reading ingredient labels is important. “We can’t tell what is in a food just by looking at it. The label tells us all of the ingredients in the food.”
- Consider using sight word cards with allergen names and pictures to help your child learn the spelling of their allergens.
- As your child learns to read, let them practice label reading with you at home and at the store. Show them the name and spellings of their allergens. Consider cutting out labels of different foods and sorting them into piles of safe and unsafe foods with your child.
- Be consistent with family rules. “If there is no label, we can’t eat the food.”

# Food Allergy Stages: Early Grade School (5–8 years)

## Recognizing and Treating an Allergic Reaction

- Teach your child about symptoms of an allergic reaction and to tell an adult if they feel sick or think they ate a food to which they are allergic.
- Explain why you keep the epinephrine auto-injector close by at all times. “If you have a reaction, it will help you feel better quickly.”
- Help your child practice with an auto-injector training device (e.g., on themselves, you, a doll) to feel more comfortable. Make sure your child understands not to play with their actual epinephrine auto-injector. Tell them a grown-up would give the medicine for a real reaction.



## Managing Food Allergies at Home

- Start to involve your child in cooking, so they can learn about preparing safe meals.
- Create a space for safe, ready-to-serve snacks. Consider using simple labels your child can understand, such as green light stickers or the word “safe.”
- Talk about routines you follow before you leave the house. “Let’s use the bathroom, grab your coat, and make sure we have your epinephrine auto-injector.”

## Eating Out at Restaurants

- Include your child in communication at restaurants. “I have food allergies to wheat and soy.” You can practice language ahead of time through play or role-plays.



## Managing Food Allergies at Childcare/School

- If there is an allergen-free table in the lunchroom, find out how children with food allergies are socially included (e.g., choosing a friend with a safe lunch to join them).
- Talk with your child about routines they will follow at school (e.g., washing hands before and after eating, no sharing food, telling an adult if they need help or think they may be having a reaction).
- Find out how classmates will learn about food allergies (e.g., lesson from the nurse or teacher, children’s book or video). When peers understand, they want to be helpers.
- Practice how your child would tell the teacher if they feel sick or think they may be having an allergic reaction.

## Navigating Social Activities

- Take things in steps. Get to know parents of your child’s friends by hosting play dates or staying at others’ homes. This gives you a chance to educate about your child’s allergies.
- Keep a supply of safe treats to have available for birthday parties and celebrations.
- Talk with your child ahead of time about what they can and cannot eat at social events. Involve them in choosing a safe treat to bring along.
- At the event, introduce your child to the adult they can talk to if they need help.
- Teach your child to only take food from approved adults. Role-play what to say if offered food. “No thank you, I have food allergies,” or “I have to ask my parent.”
- Consider having your child wear a medical identification bracelet. Ask your child what kind of bracelet they want. At this age they may prefer a more traditional metal bracelet rather than a colorful plastic one.

### Supporting Your Child's Self-Esteem

- Your child may sometimes feel frustrated or sad when they cannot eat a food, or have to do things differently from other children. Let them know it's okay to have these feelings.
- Encourage your child to come to you if they are feeling upset. Listen first. Even if you can't "fix" the situation, it is important for your child to know that you understand.
- Praise your child for making good choices. "I know it was hard when you couldn't eat the snack at soccer. I was proud when you said 'no thank you.' Let's get a safe treat now."
- Practice language for common situations so your child will feel more confident (e.g., how to explain to curious friends why they are not eating the cake at the birthday party).
- Check in with your child about any teasing or bullying about food allergies. If there are concerns, talk to the school/adults in charge. Bullying should never be ignored.



### Managing Your Child's Anxiety and Feeling Confident

- Your child may sometimes have "what if" questions about allergies or feel nervous about eating in some situations. Encourage them to come to you with questions or worries.
- Involve your child in coming up with coping thoughts and plans, based on what they know about managing food allergies. "I will only be eating food that's safe for me."
- After an allergic reaction, help your child return to normal food allergy management routines. You can help them feel in control by talking about how the emergency plan worked well. "You did the right thing when you told me your throat felt tight," or "We used your auto-injector and you felt better quickly". This can also be an opportunity to talk about anything you will do differently to stay safe in the future.
- Talk with your child's allergist or primary care provider if your child is worrying about food allergies, or if they start to avoid safe foods or situations where food is present. Mental health professionals can help families cope with anxiety related to a child's medical condition.

### Preparing Children for Medical Visits

- Talk to your child about medical visits about 1-3 days ahead of time.
- Provide information about what to expect. "The skin test may feel itchy for a little while. We'll bring a video game or crayons to keep busy so it doesn't bother you."
- For procedures like blood testing, offer your child coping strategies such as distraction (e.g., watching a video, counting backwards) or a relaxation technique such as deep breathing.
- At this stage, some children will want to participate in their medical visits. Encourage your child to be involved in the appointment if they want to be, such as asking their own questions about their food allergy, talking with their allergist about how to avoid allergens and how their Anaphylaxis Action Plan works, and helping you practice with an epinephrine auto-injector training device. If your child is nervous, plan for a small reward immediately after the visit.
- After the appointment, praise your child for their participation. Encourage them to share their feelings and review what they learned for the next appointment.

See the Food Allergy Stages *Late Grade School* handout for questions about managing food allergies as your child gets older.



# Late Grade School (8–11 years)

The Food Allergy Stages handouts were designed to help families manage food allergies at different developmental stages.

- Use the *Food Allergy Basics for All Ages* handout to learn about important information all parents should know when they have a child with food allergies.
- Always speak with your child’s allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child’s food allergy management plan.



**Older children can be more involved in managing their own food allergies with adult support. Gradually including children in food allergy management helps them build the skills and confidence they will need to manage food allergies independently in the future.**

### Teaching Children about Food Allergy

- Your child will pick up on your cues about coping with their food allergy. When your words and behaviors show you are confident, this will help them feel more confident too.
- Give the message that food allergies are manageable. “If you eat a food you are allergic to, this could cause an allergic reaction. But the steps we take to avoid allergens and treat reactions work very well to keep you safe.”
- You can use examples of other steps you take to reduce risk in daily life. “Just like we stay on safe paths and always wear a helmet when we ride a bike, we read ingredient labels and always keep your epinephrine auto-injector close by.”
- Avoid scary language such as “life threatening food allergies” that can cause anxiety.
- Make sure your child knows the names of their food allergens and what they look like.
- Let your child know they can come to you with questions about allergies.



## Food Allergy Stages: Late Grade School (8-11 years)

### Allergen Exposure

- Reinforce rules such as hand washing before eating and no food sharing.
- Teach your child that just being near or smelling an allergen does not cause a reaction. If allergen gets on their skin, they should wash it off. Skin keeps allergens out of the body!

### Label Reading

- Older children can take on more responsibility for label reading with adults there to double-check. Practice label reading with foods in your pantry and at the grocery store.
- Teach your child about rules you have developed with their allergist for avoiding foods with precautionary labeling (e.g., “may contain”). It is important to be clear and consistent.
- Reinforce that if there is no label, your child should not eat the food. “When in doubt, don’t eat the food.”



### Recognizing and Treating an Allergic Reaction

- Use your child’s Anaphylaxis Action Plan to teach them about possible symptoms of a reaction, such as hives, swelling, vomiting, diarrhea, cough, and throat tightening. Review the plan at least once each year.
- Teach your child to tell an adult if they think they have eaten a food that contains their allergens or if they think they may be having an allergic reaction.
- Explain why you keep the epinephrine auto-injector close by at all times. “Epinephrine is a safe medicine. If you have a reaction, it will help you feel better quickly.”
- Help your child practice with an auto-injector training device regularly to build comfort.
- If your child is nervous about the auto-injector, let them know that the needle is short and skinny (about the length of a dime and shorter than needles for routine shots).

### Managing Food Allergies at Home

- Involve your child in food preparation to learn steps to prepare safe meals.
- Create a space for safe, ready-to-serve snacks. Read labels with your child and consider adding “safe” stickers to these foods.
- Make sure your child knows where epinephrine auto-injectors are stored in the house.
- Help your child build a routine of bringing their auto-injector with them whenever they leave the house. “Use the bathroom, grab your coat, and make sure we have your epinephrine auto-injector.”
- Consider using checklists to help increase your child’s independence in managing food allergies (e.g., dance bag packing list: ballet shoes, water bottle, safe snack, epinephrine auto-injector).





## Eating Out at Restaurants

- Encourage your child to explain their allergy at restaurants. You can add details and ask more questions as needed.
- Practice restaurant skills ahead of time using role plays and by looking at menus online.
- Teach your child examples of cross-contact and hidden ingredients for their allergens.

## Managing Food Allergies at School

- Involve your child in deciding where they will sit during lunch if this is an option at their school. Some children feel safest at an allergen-friendly table while others prefer a safe spot at their classroom table.
- Talk with your child about routines they will follow at school (e.g., washing hands before and after eating, no sharing food, telling an adult if they need help or think they may be having a reaction).
- Check in with your child about any teasing or bullying about food allergies. If there are concerns, talk to the school/adults in charge. Bullying about should never be ignored.

## Navigating Social Activities

- Keep a supply of safe treats to have available for birthday parties and celebrations.
- Partner with your child to plan ahead for social events involving food. Some children prefer to eat ahead of time, while others prefer to identify safe food options or bring safe food from home.
- Make sure your child knows the adult in charge and where their epinephrine auto-injector will be kept.
- Help your child practice language for handling common situations, such as ways to say no if offered food or explain why they brought their own food to the party.



## Supporting Self-Esteem

- Your child may sometimes feel frustrated, sad, or self-conscious because of food allergies. Let your child know it's okay to have these feelings.
- Encourage your child to come to you if they are feeling upset. Listen first. Even if you can't "fix" the situation, it is important for children to know that you understand.
- Praise your child for making good choices. "I know it was hard when you couldn't eat the pizza at the soccer team party. I am proud about how you explained your allergies."
- Help your child teach friends about food allergies. When friends understand allergies they can be more supportive and choose activities that include your child.

### Managing Anxiety and Feeling Confident

- Your child may start to think more about risks related to food allergy at this age. Common misunderstandings are that just being near a food is dangerous, or that smelling or touching the food could cause anaphylaxis.
- Ask your child's allergist to talk with your child about how to stay safe without limiting daily activities.
- Team up with your child to plan ahead for situations they are worried about.
- Involve your child in coming up with coping thoughts for challenging situations based on what they know about food allergies. "It's not dangerous just to smell peanut butter." Or, "I'm not going to be eating my friend's food!"
- If your child has an allergic reaction, they may feel more worried afterwards. Help your child return to their usual allergy management routines. Talk with them about the parts of the emergency plan that worked well. "You did the right thing when you told me your stomach hurt," or "Your auto-injector stopped the reaction quickly." This can also be an opportunity to talk about anything you will do differently to stay safe in the future.
- Talk with your child's allergist or primary care provider if they are experiencing anxiety about food allergies. This could include worried thoughts, eating fewer foods (even if the food is safe), needing reassurance that food is safe, or avoiding social situations involving food. Mental health professionals can help families cope with anxiety related to food allergies.



### Preparing Children for Medical Visits

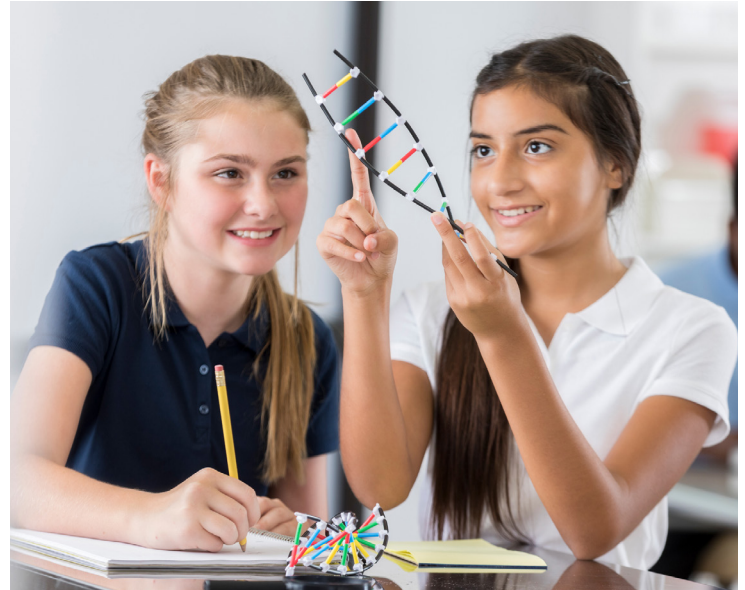
- Talk to your child about the appointment several days ahead of time. Discuss what will happen and let your child ask questions.
- Ask your child to think about questions for their allergist and make a list.
- If your child is worried about the appointment, plan ahead of time how you will use coping strategies. For skin testing, bring activities to keep busy (e.g., games on a tablet, drawing, or reading). For procedures like blood testing, consider coping strategies such as distraction (e.g., watching a video, counting backwards) or a relaxation technique such as deep breathing.
- Involve your child in the appointment, such as talking with their allergist about how their Anaphylaxis Action Plan works and practicing with an epinephrine auto-injector training device.
- After the appointment, provide verbal praise for your child's participation. Encourage them to share their feelings and review what they learned for the next appointment.

See the Food Allergy Stages *Early Teen* handout for questions about managing food allergies as your child gets older.

# Early Teen (11–14 years)

The Food Allergy Stages handouts were designed to help families manage food allergies at different developmental stages.

- Use the *Food Allergy Basics for All Ages* handout to learn about important information all parents should know when they have a child with food allergies.
- Always speak with your child’s allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child’s food allergy management plan.



**Early teens can play a bigger role in managing their food allergies with continued adult support. When you gradually give your child more responsibility, this helps them build the skills and confidence to manage food allergies independently in the future.**

### Teaching Pre-Teens and Teens about Food Allergy

- Your child will pick up on your cues about coping with their food allergy. When your words and behaviors show you are confident, this will help them feel more confident too.
- Empower your child with the message that food allergies are manageable. “Allergic reactions can be serious, but the steps we take to manage allergies work well to keep you safe and let you do the things you enjoy.”
- As your child starts to share more of the responsibility for managing their food allergies, check in with them regularly about how things are going. Talk about who will be responsible for different tasks (e.g., reading ingredient labels, communicating about food allergies, carrying the epinephrine auto-injector). At this age, a team approach works best.
- Let your child know they can always come to you with questions or tell you if they think they made a “mistake.” When you keep the lines of communication open, this is an opportunity to build problem-solving skills.

### Allergen Exposure

- Make sure your child understands the different ways to come into contact with an allergen. Eating the food causes the greatest risk for anaphylaxis.
- Teach your child that just being near or smelling an allergen does not cause a reaction (e.g., smelling a peanut butter sandwich cannot cause an allergic reaction). In rare cases, allergic reactions can occur from breathing in the allergen. This only happens in very specific situations, usually during cooking (e.g., steaming fish). These reactions are usually mild.
- If allergen gets on their skin, this could cause hives or other skin symptoms. They should wash off the allergen with soap and water.
- Reinforce routines such as hand-washing before eating and not sharing food.

# Food Allergy Stages: Early Teen (11-14 years)

## Label Reading

- Once your child starts spending time on their own, it is important that they know how to read ingredient labels.
- Practice label reading with your child using foods in your pantry and at the grocery store.
- Teach your child the rules you have developed with their allergist for avoiding foods with precautionary labeling (e.g., “may contain”). It is important to be clear and consistent.
- Teach your child to read ingredient labels every time, because ingredients can change.
- Reinforce that if you/your child cannot read a label, your child should not eat the food.



## Recognizing and Treating an Allergic Reaction

- Use your child’s Anaphylaxis Action Plan to teach about possible symptoms of a reaction, including symptoms that should be treated with epinephrine. Review the plan each year.
- Teach your child how to use their epinephrine auto-injector. Practice using a training device for the brand of epinephrine auto-injector they carry. If you have expired auto-injectors you no longer need, consider having your child practice on an orange or grapefruit.
- Talk about why your child should have their auto-injector with them at all times. Epinephrine is a safe medicine that works well to stop allergic reactions. It works best when it is given soon after the reaction.
- Help your child build the habit of bringing their epinephrine auto-injector with them whenever they leave the house (e.g., use the bathroom, grab your coat, and take your epinephrine auto-injector). Plan for how they will carry their medications (e.g., in a backpack, purse).
- Discuss your child’s emergency plan. They should tell an adult if they think they are having an allergic reaction.
- Make sure your child knows how to call 911 for transportation to the emergency room for anaphylaxis.
- If your child is nervous about the auto-injector, let them know that the needle is short and skinny (about the length of a dime and shorter than needles for routine shots).

## Managing Food Allergies at Home

- Teach your child about steps to avoid cross-contact.
- Involve your child in meal planning, grocery shopping, and cooking to learn steps to prepare safe meals.
- Keep safe ready-to-serve foods available so your child can prepare snacks independently.
- Make sure you and your child have a plan for where epinephrine auto-injectors will be stored in the house.

## Eating Out at Restaurants

- It is important to involve your child in steps you take to eat out safely.
- Visit restaurant web sites together to practice thinking about safe options.
- Use role plays to practice communicating about allergies and asking about food preparation at restaurants. Make sure to practice talking about common examples of cross-contact and hidden ingredients for your child’s allergens.
- Let your child take the lead role in communicating with restaurant staff. You can provide support as needed.
- Make sure your child always has their epinephrine auto-injector with them at the restaurant. Remind them that they should not eat without it.
- If your child will be eating out with friends, consider calling or visiting the restaurant ahead of time with your child so they will feel prepared.
- Help your child practice language to use when eating out with friends. “I always tell the restaurant about my food allergies. It’s just my routine.”
- Consider having your child carry their own “chef card” that lists their allergens.

# Food Allergy Stages: Early Teen (11-14 years)

## Managing Food Allergies at School

- Depending on school policies, your child may be able to start carrying their epinephrine auto-injector with them. Talk to your child about their comfort with self-carrying. Always have back-up medication stored in the nurse's office.
- Involve your child in choosing where they will sit in the lunchroom. Some children feel safest at an allergen-free table, while others prefer to choose a safe spot with friends.
- Involve your child in planning how to handle school events where food will be served.
- Talk to your child about their role in managing food allergies at school (e.g., communicating about allergies, reading labels, not sharing food, hand washing, knowing symptoms of an allergic reaction and letting staff know if they feel sick).
- Check in with your child about any teasing, bullying, or social exclusion related to food allergies.



## Navigating Social Activities

- Partner with your child to plan ahead for social events involving food. When they choose a plan that works for them, they will feel more confident and take fewer risks.
- If possible, check ahead of time what foods will be served at the event. Make sure your child is comfortable communicating about their allergies and reading labels.
- Some children may prefer to eat ahead of time or bring safe food from home.
- Your child should always bring their epinephrine auto-injector, even if they will not be eating. Help your child plan how to carry medication.
- Make sure friends know where your child keeps their auto-injector and what to do in an emergency.
- Start to talk about new situations that may come up as your child gets older, such as dating. Your child should know that mouth kissing can transfer allergens. Discuss ways to reduce this risk. For example, no mouth kissing unless the partner knows about the food allergy and has avoided your child's allergens for at least several hours (eating an allergen-free meal can help too). At restaurants, suggest that the partner's meal also be allergen-free.
- Begin to discuss the risks of drugs and alcohol. These can affect decision-making, such as not being as careful about avoiding allergens and making it harder to recognize and treat allergic reactions. Alcohol can contain allergens. It can also make food allergen proteins travel from your stomach to your bloodstream faster and undigested, so you might have a more severe reaction to a much smaller amount of the food.





### Supporting Self-Esteem

- Fitting in with peers is important at this age. Some children may feel self-conscious about their food allergies or embarrassed to speak up about allergies in social situations.
- Encourage your child to tell their friends about their allergies. When friends understand allergies, they are more likely to choose activities that include your teen and help them stay safe.
- Role-play strategies for handling peer pressure to try a food, or speaking up if an activity is not safe. This will help your child feel prepared to speak up for themselves if needed.
- Let your child know it's okay to feel frustrated, sad, or angry at times because of food allergies. Encourage your child to come to you if they are feeling upset. Listen first without interrupting. Your child should know you understand their perspective.
- Let your child know that you are proud of safe choices they make.

### Managing Anxiety and Feeling Confident

- As children manage allergies more independently, they may feel more worried about activities where food is present. Some children worry more about risks related to food allergy. Common misunderstandings are that just being near a food is dangerous, or that touching the food will cause a severe reaction.
- Ask your child's allergist to talk with your child about how to stay safe without limiting daily activities.
- Team up with your child to plan ahead for situations they are worried about.
- Involve your child in coming up with coping thoughts, based on what they know about food allergies. "It's not dangerous just to smell peanut butter."
- If your child has an allergic reaction, they may feel more worried afterwards. Help them return to allergy management routines. Talk about the parts of the emergency plan that worked well. "You did the right thing when you told your teacher your stomach hurt," or "Your auto-injector stopped the reaction quickly." This can also be an opportunity to talk about anything you will do differently to stay safe in the future.
- Talk with your child's allergist or primary care provider if they are feeling anxious about food allergies. This could include worried thoughts, eating fewer foods (even if the food is safe), avoiding social activities when food is present, or needing more reassurance that food is safe. Mental health professionals can help children cope with anxiety related to food allergies.

### Preparing Children for Medical Visits

- Talk to your child a few days ahead of time about the reason for their allergy visit and procedures they may have. Give them a chance to share their feelings and ask questions.
- Ask your child to think about and write down questions to ask their allergist. This will help them play an active role in the visit.
- Consider giving your child one-on-one time with their allergist to talk about topics such as kissing or drugs and alcohol.
- If your child is worried about the appointment, plan coping strategies ahead of time. For skin testing, bring activities to keep busy (e.g., games on a phone or tablet, drawing, or reading). For procedures like blood testing, consider coping strategies such as distraction (e.g., watching a video, counting backwards) or a relaxation technique such as breathing.
- After the appointment, talk with your child about what they learned.

**See the Food Allergy Stages *Late Teen* handout for questions about managing food allergies as your teen gets older.**



# Late Teen (14–18 years)

The Food Allergy Stages handouts were designed to help families manage food allergies at different developmental stages.

- Use the *Food Allergy Basics for All Ages* handout to learn about important information all parents should know when they have a child with food allergies.
- Always speak with your child's allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child's food allergy management plan.



**In the teen years, the responsibility for food allergy management gradually shifts from the parent to the child. You can help prepare your teen for this transition. Teens do best when they understand their management plan and have continued family support.**

### Teaching Teens about Food Allergy

- Empower your teen with the message that food allergies are manageable. "Allergic reactions can be serious, but the steps you take to manage your food allergies work well to keep you safe and let you do the things you enjoy."
- Teens want more independence from parents, but they are still developing problem-solving and organizational skills. Help your teen plan ahead for steps they will take to manage food allergies when you are not there.
- As your teen starts to manage food allergies more independently, check in with them regularly about how things are going. Talk about who will be responsible for different management tasks so nothing gets forgotten.
- Let your teen know they can always come to you with questions or tell you if they think they made a "mistake." When you keep the lines of communication open, this is an opportunity to build problem-solving skills.



### Allergen Exposure

- Make sure your teen understands the different ways to come into contact with an allergen. Eating the food causes the greatest risk for anaphylaxis.
- Teach your child that just being near or smelling an allergen does not cause a reaction. (e.g., smelling a peanut butter sandwich cannot cause an allergic reaction). In rare cases, allergic reactions can occur from breathing in the allergen. This only happens in very specific situations, usually during cooking (e.g., steaming fish). These reactions are usually mild.
- If allergen gets on their skin, this could cause hives or other skin symptoms. They should wash off the allergen with soap and water.
- Reinforce routines such as hand-washing before eating and not sharing food.

### Label Reading

- As your teen spends more time on their own, it is important that they know how to read ingredient labels.
- Practice label reading with your teen at home and at the grocery store.
- Teach your teen the rules you have developed with their allergist for avoiding foods with precautionary labeling (e.g., “may contain”). It is important to be clear and consistent.
- Teens can learn to call food companies if there are questions about whether a product is safe. Your teen can listen in when you call or make the call with you there to help.
- Remind your teen to read ingredient labels every time, because ingredients can change.
- Reinforce that if your teen cannot read a label, they should not eat the food.



### Recognizing and Treating a Reaction

- Use your teen’s Anaphylaxis Action Plan to teach about possible symptoms of a reaction. Make sure they understand how to recognize anaphylaxis and symptoms that should be treated with epinephrine.
- Make sure your teen knows how to self-administer epinephrine using their auto-injector. Practice regularly using a training device for the brand of auto-injector they carry. If you have expired auto-injectors you no longer need, consider having your teen practice on an orange or grapefruit.
- Talk about why your teen should have their auto-injector with them at all times. Epinephrine is a safe medicine that works well to stop allergic reactions. It works best when it is given soon after the reaction.
- Help your teen build the habit of bringing their epinephrine auto-injector with them whenever they leave the house (e.g., grab your coat and take your epinephrine auto-injector). Discuss plans for how they will feel comfortable carrying their medications (e.g., in a backpack, purse).
- Discuss your teen’s emergency plan. If there won’t be a supervising adult present, older teens can be given the independence to administer epinephrine to themselves.
- Make sure your teen knows how to call 911 for transportation to the emergency room for anaphylaxis.
- If your teen is nervous about the auto-injector, let them know that the needle it is short and skinny (about the length of a dime and shorter than needles for routine shots).

### Managing Allergies at Home

- Make sure your teen understands how to avoid cross-contact.
- Involve your teen in meal planning, grocery shopping, and cooking to learn steps to prepare safe meals.
- Keep basic ingredients and safe ready-to-serve foods available so your teen can prepare meals independently.
- Make sure you and your teen have a plan for where epinephrine auto-injectors will be stored in the house.

## Eating out at Restaurants

- It is important that your teen understand the steps involved in eating out safely.
- Visit restaurant websites together to practice thinking about safe options.
- Use role plays to practice communicating about allergies and asking about food preparation (including common examples of cross-contact and hidden ingredients for your teen's allergens).
- Let your child take the lead role in communicating with restaurant staff. You can provide support as needed.
- Make sure your teen always has their epinephrine auto-injector with them at the restaurant. Remind them that they should not eat without it.
- If your teen will be eating out with friends, consider calling or visiting the restaurant ahead of time with your teen so they will feel prepared.
- Help your child practice language to use when eating out with friends. "I always tell the restaurant about my food allergies. It's just my routine."
- Consider having your teen carry a "chef card" that lists their allergens.



## Managing Allergies at School

- At this age, your teen can be part of your annual meeting with the school to discuss their food allergy management plan.
- Depending on school policies, your teen may be able to carry their epinephrine auto-injector with them. Talk to your teen about their comfort with self-carrying. Always have back-up medication stored in the nurse's office.
- Encourage your teen to communicate with cafeteria staff about their food allergies.
- Discuss where your teen feels most comfortable sitting for lunch and make sure that area is cleaned appropriately.
- Involve your teen in planning how to handle school events where food will be served.
- Check in with your teen about any teasing, bullying, or social exclusion related to food allergies. If there are concerns, talk to the adults in charge (e.g., schools, coaches).

## Navigating Social Activities

- Partner with your teen to plan ahead for social events involving food. When they choose a plan that works for them, they will feel more confident and take fewer risks.
- If possible, check ahead of time what foods will be served at the event. Make sure your teen is comfortable communicating about their allergies and reading labels.
- Some teens may prefer to eat ahead of time or bring safe food from home.
- Your teen should always bring their epinephrine auto-injector, even if they will not be eating. Help your teen plan how to carry medication.
- Make sure friends know where your child keeps their auto-injector and what to do in an emergency. Consider helping your teen teach trusted friends how to use the epinephrine auto-injector.
- Talk openly with your teen about dating and kissing. Your teen should know that mouth kissing can transfer allergens. Discuss ways to reduce this risk. For example, no mouth kissing unless the partner knows about the food allergy and has avoided your child's allergens for at least several hours (eating an allergen-free meal can help too). At restaurants, suggest that the partner's meal also be allergen-free.
- Discuss the risks of drugs and alcohol. These can affect decision-making, such as not being as careful about avoiding allergens and making it harder to recognize and treat allergic reactions. Alcohol can contain allergens. It can also make food allergen proteins travel from your stomach to your bloodstream faster and undigested, so you might have a more severe reaction to a much smaller amount of the food.

# Food Allergy Stages: Late Teen (14-18 years)

## Supporting Self-Esteem

- Fitting in with peers is important for teens. Teens may worry about food allergies drawing attention or feel embarrassed to speak up about allergies in social situations.
- Encourage your teen to tell their friends about their allergies. When friends understand your child's routines, allergies are less likely to be a "big deal" and friends are more likely to choose activities that include your teen and help them stay safe.
- Role play language your teen can use in new or challenging situations, such as handling peer pressure to try a food, speaking up if a restaurant is not a safe choice, or talking to a partner about risks with kissing. This will help your teen feel prepared to speak up for themselves if needed.
- Let your teen know it's okay to feel frustrated, sad, or angry at times because of food allergies. Encourage your teen to come to you if they are feeling upset. Listen first without interrupting. Your child should know you understand their perspective.
- Let your teen know that you are proud of the safe choices they make.



## Managing Anxiety and Feeling Confident

- As teens start to manage food allergies independently, they may worry about how to handle new situations, such as talking to romantic partners about food allergies or handling an allergic reaction.
- Encourage your teen to come to you with their questions or worries. Team up to plan for situations they feel worried about.
- Ask your teen's allergist to talk with your teen about the level of risk in different situations and how to stay safe without limiting daily activities.
- If your teen has a reaction, they may feel more worried afterwards. Reinforce good food allergy management routines and talk about parts of the emergency plan that worked well. "You did the right thing when you told your friends your throat was itchy," or "We learned how quickly the auto-injector can stop a reaction." This can also be an opportunity to talk about anything you will do differently to stay safe in the future.
- Talk with your teen's allergist or primary care provider if they are feeling anxious about food allergies. This could include worried thoughts, eating fewer foods (even if the food is safe), avoiding social activities when food is present or needing more reassurance that food is safe. Mental health professionals can help teens cope with anxiety related to food allergies.

## Preparing Children for Medical Visits

- Talk to your teen ahead of time about the reason for their allergy visit and any procedures they may have. Give them a chance to share their feelings and ask questions.
- If your teen is worried about the appointment, plan coping strategies ahead of time. For skin testing, plan activities to keep busy (e.g., games on a phone or tablet, sketching, or reading). For procedures like blood testing, consider coping strategies such as distraction (e.g., watching a video, counting backwards) or a relaxation technique such as breathing.
- Prepare your teen for playing a bigger role in allergy appointments. Ask them to think about questions to ask their allergist. It may help to keep a list.
- Allow teens to have one-on-one time with their allergist to talk about topics such as kissing or drugs and alcohol.
- After the appointment, talk with your teen about what they learned.
- Some allergists specialize in working with children and teenagers. Talk with your child's allergist to find out if and when they will need to switch to an adult allergist. You can ask your current allergist for help in this process. You can also use the following resource: <https://allergist.aaaai.org/find>

See the **Food Allergy Stages Young Adult** handout for questions about managing food allergies away from home as your teen gets older.

# Young Adults (18–21 years)

The Food Allergy Stages handouts were designed to help patients and families manage food allergies at different developmental stages. Always speak with your allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your food allergy management plan.

**Young adults should be ready to take the primary responsibility for day-to-day food allergy management. They do best with continued family support during this transition.**



## Preparing to Take Responsibility for Food Allergy Management

- Keep in mind that you have already worked hard to develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to manage food allergies in daily life. Now you will be thinking about how to use these skills in new situations, such as at college or in the workplace.
- Family, friends, and roommates can be a great support team. Your allergist will also be a good partner as you plan for these transitions.
- Check in with your support team from time to time about how things are going and to ask questions, especially when there are changes in routine.
- Over time, you will feel more confident making decisions and advocating for yourself about food allergy management.

## Allergen Exposure

- It is important to understand different ways that you can come into contact with food allergens so you can take steps to avoid them.
- Ingestion (by mouth): Eating food containing an allergen is the type of exposure most likely to cause anaphylaxis.
- Inhalation (breathing in the allergen): Just smelling the food or being near it does not cause an allergic reaction. In rare cases, allergic reactions can happen if the allergen is inhaled. This occurs only in specific situations when proteins can enter the air, usually by cooking (e.g., a person with fish allergy is near steaming fish). These allergic reactions are usually mild. Talk with your allergist if this happens to you, so that you can make a plan to avoid these situations.
- Skin contact (by touch): If a food allergen gets on your skin, this could cause hives or other skin symptoms. Wash off the allergen with soap and water so it will not accidentally get into your mouth, nose, or eyes. Hand washing before and after eating helps to reduce the risk of an allergic reaction.



## Label Reading

- Make sure you know how to read ingredient labels for your food allergens, including precautionary labeling (e.g., “may contain”).
- Make sure you know how to call food companies if there are questions about whether a product is safe. If this is a new skill for you, you can listen in when a family member calls.
- Remember to read ingredient labels every time, because ingredients can change.

## Managing Food Allergies at Home

- Make sure you know the steps to avoid cross-contact in your living space, whether that is your family’s home, a dorm room, or an apartment.
- Talk with your support team about strategies for meal planning and grocery shopping to ensure you have safe meal options available. It helps to have ready-to-serve foods available for times you may be too busy to cook or go to the college dining facility.
- Talk with roommates and friends about your food allergies, including steps they can take to create a safe living space and issues that arise when cooking and eating together.
- Roommates should know where you keep your epinephrine auto-injectors and how to use them in case you are unable to self-administer.

## Recognizing and Treating an Allergic Reaction

- Make sure you understand your Anaphylaxis Action Plan. Review the possible symptoms of a reaction, including symptoms that should be treated with epinephrine.
- Make sure you know how to self-administer epinephrine using your auto-injector. Visit the website for your device to read instructions. Most brands also have online training videos.
- Practice regularly using a training device for the brand of epinephrine auto-injector you carry. You can also use expired auto-injectors that are no longer needed to practice on an orange or grapefruit.
- Review how to call 911 for transportation to the emergency room for serious reactions.
- Remember the facts about epinephrine. Epinephrine is a safe medicine that works well to stop allergic reactions. It works best when it is given soon after the reaction. That is why you should carry your epinephrine auto-injector with you at all times, even if you do not plan on eating.
- Make a plan for how you will carry your epinephrine auto-injector with you.
- If you are nervous about the epinephrine auto-injector, keep in mind that the needle is short and skinny (about the length of a dime and shorter than needles for routine shots).

## Eating Out at Restaurants

- Make sure you feel confident telling restaurant staff about your food allergies, asking how food is prepared, and explaining cross-contact and hidden ingredients.
- If you need practice with these skills, visit restaurant websites and practice ways to communicate about food allergies with a member of your support team.
- Make sure you always have your epinephrine auto-injector with you at the restaurant. You should not eat without it.
- If you will be eating out somewhere new, look at the restaurant website and call ahead of time to ask questions so you will feel prepared.
- Consider carrying a “chef card” that lists your allergens.
- Remember that it is okay to ask for a new dish if there is a mistake or to leave if you don’t think the restaurant can prepare food that is safe for you.



## Managing Food Allergies at College

- If you are applying to colleges, talk with schools ahead of time about their food allergy management policies. On campus tours, visit the dining halls to see how food allergy is managed.
- Talk to someone at the disability services office at your college about your food allergies. Disability services can help coordinate your food allergy management plan with housing, dining, and health services.
- Find out how food is prepared in dining halls, how students can access allergen information, and what special meal options may be available for students with food allergies. Also ask about emergency plans in dining facilities.
- Find out what housing options and choices for roommate assignments are available. Consider whether a single dorm room or living with a roommate makes the most sense for you.
- Find out whether you can have a private mini-refrigerator or microwave to store and prepare safe foods. Consider whether a kitchen is necessary for meal preparation.
- Find out whether your resident advisor (RA) will be trained on managing food allergies. Make sure you speak with your RA and roommates about how to keep your living space safe and what to do in an emergency.

## Navigating Social Activities

- Make sure to communicate about your food allergies and read ingredient labels at social events. Think about plans to handle situations when there may not be a safe option available, such as eating ahead of time or bringing your own food.
- Research allergy-friendly restaurants ahead of time so you can suggest good options for hanging out with friends or for work celebrations.
- Tell friends and romantic partners about your food allergies and the importance of avoiding allergens. Teach them where you keep your epinephrine auto-injector and what to do in an emergency. This includes teaching friends and romantic partners how to use the auto-injector if you are unable to administer it yourself.
- Be aware that mouth kissing can transfer allergens. There are ways to reduce this risk. For example, no mouth kissing unless the partner knows about the food allergy and has avoided your allergens for at least several hours (eating an allergen-free meal can help too). At restaurants, suggest that your partner's meal also be allergen-free.
- Know the risks of drugs and alcohol. These can affect decision-making, such as not being as careful about avoiding allergens and making it harder to recognize and treat allergic reactions. Alcohol can contain allergens. It can also make food allergen proteins travel from your stomach to your bloodstream faster and undigested, so you might have a more severe reaction to a much smaller amount of the food.

## Supporting Self-Esteem

- Build a support network by talking to friends about your food allergies. When friends understand your routines, allergies are less likely to be a "big deal" and friends will be more likely to choose inclusive activities.
- If you attend college, check with the school to find out if there is a support group or organization for students with food allergies.
- Plan ahead about how to speak up for yourself in new or challenging situations. Examples might include handling peer pressure to try an alcoholic drink at a party, letting friends know that a restaurant is not a safe choice for you, talking to work supervisor about ways to avoid cross-contact in a shared kitchen, or talking to a partner about risks with kissing. Your support team and allergist can help come up with ideas.
- It's normal to feel frustrated, down, or angry at times because of food allergies. Reach out to a member of your support team when you are feeling upset or just need to talk about it.



## Managing Anxiety and Feeling Confident

- Managing food allergies independently can be stressful at times. Once you develop routines, you will feel more confident and in control.
- Reach out to your family or other members of your support team with questions or worries. You can collaborate with them to plan for situations you feel worried about.
- Your allergist can answer questions about the level of risk in different situations and good strategies to stay safe without limiting daily activities.
- If you have an allergic reaction, it is common to feel more worried afterwards. Think about parts of your emergency plan that worked well (e.g., “The epinephrine auto-injector stopped the reaction quickly.”). This can also be an opportunity to think about anything you can do differently to stay safe in the future.
- Talk with your allergist or primary care provider if you are feeling anxious or down about food allergies. This could include worried thoughts, avoiding safe foods due to worry, or feeling uncomfortable in social activities when food is present. Mental health professionals can help young adults cope with stress related to food allergies.

## Preparing to Manage Your Healthcare

- Talk with your family, allergist, and primary care provider about skills you will need to take a lead role in your healthcare. This may include scheduling medical appointments, filling prescriptions, understanding insurance coverage and copayments, and contacting your allergist with questions.
- Prepare for appointments with your allergist by thinking about questions ahead of time. It may help to keep a list.
- Consider attending appointments with your allergist independently, or make sure to have one-on-one time with the allergist during the appointment to talk about topics such as kissing or drugs and alcohol.
- Think about strategies to remember to refill prescriptions before they run out or expire. It may help to keep reminders on your phone.
- If you are living away from home, find out the location of the nearest hospital or medical facility, in case of an emergency.
- Some allergists specialize in working with children and teenagers. Talk with your allergist about whether or not you will need to switch to an adult allergist. If you will need to find a new allergist because of your age or location, ask your current allergist for help in this process. You can also use the following resource: <https://allergist.aaaai.org/find>

