

# Food challenges and supervised feeds

## What happens at a food challenge or supervised feed?

These are tests done in hospital to see if your child can eat certain foods. Your child might have a food challenge or supervised feed if other allergy tests (such as skin prick tests or blood tests) have not given us a clear answer about if they are allergic to the food or not.

In both tests your child eats the food under hospital supervision in case they have an allergic reaction. If your child is having a food challenge, they will eat 4 or 5 doses of the food we are testing and this will take about 5 hours. A supervised feed is a bit quicker. Your child will only have 1 dose of the food and this test will take about 2 hours.

Your child will need to eat a full portion of the food to make sure they are safe, and can continue to have the portions at least 2 to 3 times a week at home.

The specialist you saw at your outpatient clinic appointment will discuss if a food challenge or supervised feed is the right test for your child. If it is, they will make a referral for your child, and our nursing team will call you. This call is your pre-assessment call. The nurse will explain more about what will happen on the day, let you know what you should bring with you, and they will book your child's appointment.

## Benefits of the tests

- Safely find out if your child is able to eat a food
- Eat a food which your child isn't eating at the moment
- Make your family's life easier by:
  - reducing the time you spend checking labels
  - making eating outside the family home easier
  - reducing the time you spend shopping
  - reducing the worry of having an allergic reaction
  - recognising the signs of an allergic reaction, and knowing how to treat it.

## Risks of the tests

Your child might have an allergic reaction during the test, which is why it is carried out in hospital. Symptoms of an allergic reaction might include:

Common	Uncommon	Rare
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• itching</li> <li>• rashes</li> <li>• hives</li> <li>• tummy ache</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• swelling</li> <li>• diarrhoea</li> <li>• being sick (vomiting)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• runny nose or eyes</li> <li>• sneezing</li> <li>• coughing</li> <li>• wheezing</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulty breathing</li> <li>• life-threatening anaphylaxis</li> </ul>

## Before you arrive

It is really important that your child is well enough to have a food challenge or supervised feed for 2 reasons. If your child:

- is unwell they might have a more severe allergic reaction
- has any symptoms that are similar to an allergic reaction (such as a rash or runny nose), it might be difficult for us to tell if they are having an allergic reaction or not.

In the week before your child's test, make sure you check your child for signs of illness such as:

- rash or worse eczema
- runny nose, sneezing or a cough
- diarrhoea or being sick
- worsening asthma (increased use of blue inhaler).

If your child does not normally have these symptoms, but shows them in the week before the test, please let us know.

If your child has been in contact with someone who has had an infectious disease (such as chicken pox) within 2 weeks of the test, please let us know before you come.

If you have any concerns about your child's health before you come in for the test, you can phone our specialist nurses, **tel:** 020 7188 9783.

## Food

Please make sure you know what food your child will be eating, and bring it with you on the day of the test. You will need to bring the food with you in the form your child will eat it, for example if your child will be eating nuts, you might bring with you whole nuts, ground nuts or nut butters. You can also bring some other food to mix with the test food, such as yogurt or fruit puree.

The allergy dietitians have developed some recipes for biscuits and cakes, which might make it easier for your child to eat the right amount of the food. If you would like a recipe and have not received one, please ask a member of the team. The recipes are also available on the Evelina London website under Food Challenges on the Allergy Service page.

## Medicine

If your child is taking antihistamine medicine (such as Piriton<sup>®</sup>, Zirtek<sup>®</sup> or Clarityn<sup>®</sup>), they will need to stop taking it before they come to the appointment, because it may interfere with the results of the test.

Your child should stop taking short-acting antihistamines, such as chlorphenamine (Piriton) 2 days before the test. Your child should stop taking long-acting antihistamines, such as cetirizine (Zirtek) and loratidine (Clarityn) 5 days before the test.

Some cough and cold, and travel sickness medicines also contain antihistamines. If you are unsure if you can give these to your child before they come to the test, speak to your pharmacist or phone our specialist nurses, **tel:** 020 7188 9783.

Your child does not need to stop taking any other medications (such as asthma inhalers or nasal sprays) before they come, but please bring with you a list of any medicines your child takes.

## Asthma

If your child has asthma, it is important that it is under control for them to do the test. If you think your child's asthma is worse than usual in the week before the test, please phone our specialist nurses, **tel:** 020 7188 9783.

If your child has a blue (salbutamol) inhaler, your child can use it if they need it in the 2 weeks before their test, but please let the nurse know if they do. The nurse can decide if it is safe for your child to continue with the test.

## Arriving for the day

Your child will be asked to choose where they will sit for the day. Once you've settled in, one of our specialist nurses will talk to you and your child about what will happen during the day. You can ask questions and go through any concerns that you have, then you will be asked to sign a consent form before we start the food challenge or supervised feed.

You **must** bring your child's prescribed emergency medication (their adrenaline auto injector and/or antihistamines) **with you** on the day of the appointment. If you do not bring this medication with you we will not be able to proceed with the test.

## Checking your child's health

Before giving your child any food, a nurse will do some observations (check their breathing, heartbeat). They will also place a clip on your child's finger to monitor how fast their heart is beating, and how much oxygen is in their blood. It feels like a soft peg and won't hurt, but your child will need to keep still while we do this to get a clear measurement.

## The food challenge

We will start by giving your child a very small amount of the food that you brought with you. We call this the first dose. After about 20 minutes the nurse will come back and check that your child has eaten all of the food and that they are not having an allergic reaction. If you or your child think that they are having an allergic reaction before the nurse comes to see you, just ask for them to come to you earlier. Your child might have their observations checked again. If your child has eaten all of their first dose of food and not had an allergic reaction, they will be able to have their next dose.

We will continue to give your child larger portions of food until they have eaten all the doses. Usually we give 4 doses of food and this will take about 2 hours. Once your child has eaten all of their doses of food, we'll keep them on the Day Case Unit for another 2 hours to check for any signs of an allergic reaction. If there is still no sign of a reaction, we will say your child is not allergic to that food and they can eat it at home.

If we find your child is not allergic to the food that has been tested, you should give this food to them at least 3 times each week. This is so their body will know that the food is something that should be eaten.

## The supervised feed

A supervised feed is very similar to a food challenge but instead of several doses of the food we are testing, your child will have one dose, which is equivalent to a portion of that food, such as a glass (200ml) of milk or a handful (15g) of peanuts. Your child will eat this dose at their own pace, over a maximum of 30 minutes and, once they have finished eating, will remain with us for 1 hour to check for any sign of an allergic reaction. If there is no reaction, we will say your child is not allergic and they can eat that food at home.

If we find your child is not allergic to the food, you should give this food to them at least 3 times each week. This is so their body will know that the food is something that should be eaten.

## Allergic reactions

Your child might have an allergic reaction during their test and this is why we do the test in the hospital. If your child does have an allergic reaction, they will not have to eat any more of the food and they will be given medicine to stop the reaction.

Allergic reactions usually cause a rash, itching, tummy ache or nausea (feeling sick) but can sometimes make your child sick (vomit), or sneeze and have a runny nose. In rare cases your child might find it difficult to breathe but we will give them medicine straight away to stop this.

If your child has any allergic reaction they will need to stay at the hospital for longer, until they are well enough to go home, but not usually overnight.

## If your child doesn't like the food they are trying

Lots of children find the taste of a new food strange, which is perfectly normal. You might like to hide the food in another food that they do like, to help them eat it. You could also bring some of your child's favourite foods to eat after they have had their dose.

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about food challenges or supervised feeds, or if you would like to cancel or change your child's appointment, please contact our day case coordinators, **tel:** 020 7188 6390, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

For more information on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### Evelina London Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline, **tel:** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm, **email:** [letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:letstalkmedicines@gstt.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day, **tel:** 111, **web:** [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)

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