

Peanut Blog

An ounce of information



How to Prevent Kids' Peanut Allergies

Peanut allergies can be deadly, but there's good news about how to ward them off (or keep them at bay) for the long haul.

Peanut Protection

Chances are you know someone with a peanut allergy. In fact, it's one of the nine most common allergies. Parents have long wondered whether they should give their children peanuts at an early age to build immunity, or if that could be dangerous. New research published in the New England Journal of Medicine backs parents who opt for early peanut exposure.

The study follows up on 2015 research that found giving babies and toddlers peanuts or related products before the age of five protected against the allergy. The follow-up study, funded by the National Institutes of Health and released in May, found the same children were 71% less likely to develop an allergy into their teen years if they were given peanuts at an early age.

For pediatric allergists, this is a great reinforcement for the advice they are already giving parents.

"To me, that's kind of one more nudge to encourage families to introduce peanut early," says Jennifer Dantzer, pediatric allergist at Johns Hopkins Children's Center.

The 2015 study was "groundbreaking," according to Carla Davis, director of the Texas Children's Hospital Food and Allergy Program. A peanut allergy is caused because of intolerance to a certain protein in the nut, but the immune system can build a tolerance if it is exposed over time, Davis says. The question is whether that immunity could be sustained even without constant exposure.

In fact, the latest study found that after age five, frequency wasn't as important. The early introduction was enough protection.

In the 1990s, there was a thought that parents shouldn't introduce peanuts early, says Drew Bird allergy expert at UT Southwestern and Children's Health. Bird, who is also the chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics allergy and immunology section, adds that avoiding peanuts seemed to add to the problem — not prevent it.

There are still questions on how these food allergies develop. So NIH is funding a study called Sunbeam in coordination with Johns Hopkins University to search for the root causes.

For now, Bird recommends parents give their children at least two teaspoons of peanut butter three times a week. Peanuts and peanut butter can be a choking hazard for younger babies, but parents can mix peanut butter with water or milk or use peanut flour, Bird says.

Source: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/newsletters/2024-07-03/early-childhood-peanut-exposure-protects-kids-from-allergies>