In Australia, about one in 10 infants, one in 20 children up to five years of age, and two in 100 adults have food allergy or food intolerance.

**What is the difference between food allergy and food intolerance?**

**Food Allergy**

Allergies in general are on the increase worldwide and food allergies have also become more common, particularly peanut allergy in preschool children. A food allergy is an overreaction of the body’s immune system to a protein (allergic reaction) caused by inhaling, swallowing or touching a food substance which the body mistakes to be harmful. Most children grow out of it before they start school. Peanuts, tree nuts, eggs, milk, wheat, sesame, fish, shellfish and soy cause about 90 per cent of food allergic reactions. Peanut allergy is one of the most common allergies in older children as only approximately one in four children will outgrow peanut allergy.

**Symptoms**

Eczema, hives, diarrhoea, reflux, itching and swelling of skin, lips and throat, difficulty breathing (asthma can be an allergic response), headache, behavioural and mood change, vomiting and in extreme cases anaphylaxis - the most severe form of allergic reaction that is potentially life threatening and must be treated as a medical emergency, requiring immediate treatment and urgent medical attention.

Allergies are serious and can be life threatening. All early childhood services should be aware of allergic reactions that can occur in children and strategies to minimise this risk.

**Food Intolerance**

Food intolerances are adverse reactions by the body to ingested foods or chemicals that do not involve the immune system. Food intolerances are more prevalent than food allergies and there are various theories as to why food intolerances occur. The foods that tend to cause intolerance reactions in sensitive children include: dairy products, wheat and food additives.
Difference between Food Allergy and Food Intolerance

Symptoms

Rashes and swelling, stomach pains, bowel irritations and failure to thrive

It can be difficult to tell the difference between the symptoms of food allergy and food intolerance. Usually, symptoms caused by food allergy develop very soon after consuming the food. While symptoms caused by food intolerance can be immediate, they may also take 12 to 24 hours to develop.

Food intolerance reactions are usually related to the amount of the food consumed. They may not occur until a certain amount (threshold level) of the food is eaten, but this amount varies for each person.

The symptoms of food allergy and intolerance can also be caused by other conditions, so it is important to advise parents to see a doctor for a medical diagnosis.

What are some tips to help prevent reactions from food occurring in early childhood settings?

- Prevent sharing and trading of food and drinks, food utensils and containers
- Clearly label bottles, other drinks, lunchboxes and containers with the name of the child for whom they are intended
- Children with severe allergies should ideally only eat food prepared from home
- Have a food allergy management policy in place and ensure all staff and parents at your setting are familiar with it.
- Promote your allergy management policy to parents at initial enrolment and then in regular communications with parents

For more information on Allergies and Intolerances visit the Food Foundations website at www.naqld.org/category/food-foundations or visit http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/allergies_intolerances.html


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