

Difference between Food Allergy and Food Intolerance

Food Foundations • another NAQ Nutrition program

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.



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