

# Giving peanut-based foods to babies early prevents allergies



By Lauran Neergaard AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON - Most babies should start eating peanut-containing foods well before their first birthday, say guidelines released Thursday that aim to protect high-risk tots and other youngsters, too, from developing the dangerous food allergy.

The new guidelines from the National Institutes of Health mark a shift in dietary advice, based on landmark research that found early exposure dramatically lowers a baby's chances of becoming allergic.

The recommendations spell out exactly how to introduce infants to peanut-based foods and when - for some, as early as 4 to 6 months of age - depending on whether they're at high, moderate or low risk of developing one of the most troublesome food allergies.

"We're on the cusp of hopefully being able to prevent a large number of cases of peanut allergy," said Dr. Matthew Greenhawt of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, a member of the NIH-appointed panel that wrote the guidelines.

Babies at high risk - because they have a severe form of the skin rash eczema or egg allergies - need a check-up before any peanut exposure, and might get their first taste in the doctor's office.

For other tots, most parents can start adding peanut-containing foods to the diet much like they already introduced oatmeal or mashed peas.

No, babies don't get whole peanuts or a big glob of peanut butter - those are choking hazards. Instead, the guidelines include options like watered-down peanut butter or easy-to-gum peanut-flavored "puff" snacks.

"It's an important step forward," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which appointed experts to turn the research findings into user-friendly guidelines. "When you do desensitize them from an early age, you have a very positive effect."

Peanut allergy is a growing problem, affecting about 2 percent of U.S. children who must avoid the wide array of peanut-containing foods or risk severe, even life-threatening, reactions.

For years, pediatricians advised avoiding peanuts until age 3 for children thought to be at risk. But the delay didn't help, and that recommendation was dropped in 2008 - although parent wariness of peanuts persists.

"It's old news, wrong old news, to wait," said Dr. Scott Sicherer, who represented the American Academy of Pediatrics on the guidelines panel.

Thursday's guidelines make that clear, urging parents and doctors to proactively introduce peanut-based foods early.

"Just because your uncle, aunt and sibling have an allergy, that's even more reason to give your baby the food now" - even if they're already older than 6 months, added Sicherer, a pediatric allergist at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. Infants who get a taste of eggs and peanuts starting when they're as young as 4 months old may have a lower risk of developing allergies to those foods than babies who try them later, a research review suggests.

These findings suggest that for most babies, eggs and peanuts should be among their first foods, said senior study author Dr. Robert Boyle, a pediatric allergy researcher at Imperial College London.

Feeding guidelines have moved away from telling parents to avoid introducing some foods that can cause allergies until kids are 2 or 3 years old, but most recommendations still stop short of urging parents to give babies eggs and peanuts early in life.

- [Food allergies in infants may be prevented with early introduction](#)
- [Peanuts for babies? Studies back allergy-preventing strategy](#)

"Infant feeding advice may need to change," Boyle said by email.

To see how the timing of babies' introduction to certain allergenic foods influences their risk of allergies, Boyle and colleagues reviewed data from 146 studies published over the past 70 years.

When 5.4 per cent of the population has egg allergies, early introduction could avoid 24 cases for every 1,000 people, a review of data from five of those studies with 1,915 participants found.

For peanuts, when about 2.5 per cent of the population has allergies, early introduction could avoid 18 cases for every 1,000 people, a review of data 1,550 participants found.

Researchers didn't find enough evidence to determine whether early introduction of fish might reduce the likelihood of allergies in general and nasal allergies in particular.

They also looked at whether giving babies gluten, a protein in wheat, rye and barley, early might increase the risk of celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder that damages the small intestine and interferes with the absorption of nutrients from food.

But the timing of gluten introduction didn't have any impact on whether kids developed celiac disease.

In addition, researchers found no evidence that the timing of introduction of allergenic foods like eggs, peanuts and fish influenced the odds of developing other autoimmune disorders such as Type 1 diabetes.

One limitation of the analysis is that individual studies had different designs and populations, making it hard to draw broad conclusions that could apply to all children, the [authors note in JAMA](#).

## No panacea

Most infant feeding guidelines consider exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months to be ideal, but few women meet that goal, and many who do breastfeed their babies for six full months still introduce solids starting around age 4 months.

Early introduction of potentially allergenic foods may not be a panacea in preventing allergies, Dr. Matthew Greenhawt, a researcher at the University of Colorado School of Medicine in Aurora writes in an accompanying editorial.

Still, for most children, parents probably don't need to consult a doctor before introducing these foods, Greenhawt said by email.

### Consult a doctor for at-risk kids

"Most children are not at risk for developing food allergy and thus, they wouldn't need any specific intervention or supervision," Greenhawt said.

The picture is different for kids who have a high risk of developing food allergies, which can include children with severe eczema, an existing food allergy or a sibling with a peanut allergy.

Parents of at-risk kids should consult a doctor or allergy specialist before introducing foods that can trigger an allergic reaction, Greenhawt added.

The current research review doesn't address how much egg or peanut to give kids, or how often, for optimal allergy

prevention, Boyle noted.

- **Choking risk for baby-led weaning no different than spoon-feeding**

And of course, a 4-month-old can choke on whole peanuts, and should get this food in peanut butter form.

The current study adds to a growing body of evidence suggesting that early introduction of eggs and peanuts can help at least some children develop a tolerance to these foods who would otherwise be allergic, said Dr. Sandra Hong, an allergist at Cleveland Clinic in Ohio who wasn't involved in the study.

"I do think that the findings suggest a need to consider changes to clinical practice," Hong said by email. "Food alle

In Columbus, Ohio, one doctor told Carrie Stevenson to avoid peanuts after her daughter was diagnosed with egg allergy. Then Stevenson found an allergy specialist who insisted that was the wrong advice - and offered baby Estelle a taste test of peanut butter in his office when she was 7 months old.

"I was really nervous," Stevenson recalled, unsure which doctor to believe. But, "we didn't want her to have any more allergies."

Now 18 months old, Estelle has eaten peanut butter or peanut-flavored puffs at least three times a week since then and so far seems healthy. Stevenson, pregnant again, plans early exposure for her next child, too.

The guidelines recommend:

- All babies should try other solid foods before peanut-containing ones, to be sure they're developmentally ready.
- High-risk babies should have peanut-containing foods introduced as early as 4 to 6 months after a check-up to tell if they should have the first taste in the doctor's office, or if it's OK to try at home with a parent watching for any reactions.
- Moderate-risk babies have milder eczema, typically treated with over-the-counter creams. They should start peanut-based foods around 6 months, at home.
- Most babies are low-risk, and parents can introduce peanut-based foods along with other solids, usually around 6 months.
- Building tolerance requires making peanut-based foods part of the regular diet, about three times a week.

What's the evidence? First, researchers noticed a tenfold higher rate of peanut allergy among Jewish children in Britain, who aren't fed peanut products during infancy, compared to those in Israel where peanut-based foods are common starting around age 7 months.

Then in 2015, an NIH-funded study of 600 babies put that theory to the test, assigning them either to avoid or regularly eat age-appropriate peanut products. By age 5, only 2 percent of peanut eaters - and 11 percent of those at highest risk - had become allergic. Among peanut avoiders, 14 percent had become allergic, and 35 percent of those at highest risk.

Whether the dietary change will spur a drop in U.S. peanut allergies depends on how many parents heed the new advice - and if a parent seems skeptical, the guidelines urge doctors to follow up.

<http://www.downloads.imune.net/medicalbooks/Allergy%20Therapy%20for%20Cure.pdf>

<http://www.downloads.imune.net/medicalbooks/IJMSHNEM%202017%20Journal%20on%20Medicine%20uses%20Homeopathy%20to%20treat%20Allergies.pdf>