

STUDY SHOWS ORAL FOOD CHALLENGES ARE SAFE FOR DIAGNOSING FOOD ALLERGIES

In a recent study, researchers found about 2 percent of those being tested had a severe allergic reaction, also known as anaphylaxis, and only about 14 percent had any reaction at all

By [American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology](#) | September 08, 2017



ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, IL – The best way to find out if someone has a food allergy is through an oral food challenge (OFC) where the person is given a very small dose of the food by mouth under the supervision of a board-certified allergist to test for a severe reaction. A new study shows that OFCs are extremely safe, with very few people having a reaction of any kind.

The [study](#) in *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*, the scientific publication of the [American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology](#) (ACAAI) examined the results of 6,327 OFCs. The majority of those tested were under the age of 18. Researchers found about 2

percent of those being tested had a severe allergic reaction, also known as anaphylaxis, and only about 14 percent had any reaction at all.

“Oral food challenges are a very important tool for anyone who wants to know if they have a food allergy,” said allergist Kwei Akuete, MD, MPH, ACAAI member, and lead author of the study. “As OFCs are the ‘gold standard’ for determining if someone is allergic to a food, it is important they are both effective and safe. Our study showed OFCs are safer than prior studies estimated, and that OFCs should be routinely used to help determine if a food allergy exists.”

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Reactions to OFCs that weren’t classified as anaphylaxis involved only one part of the body—such as hives on the skin. They were considered mild to moderate—not severe—and were mostly treated with antihistamines. The OFCs were performed at five food allergy centers throughout the US.

“Food challenges improve the quality of life for people with food allergies, even if they are positive,” said allergist Carla Davis, MD, ACAAI member and study senior author. “When an OFC is delayed, sometimes people unnecessarily cut certain foods out of their diet, and this has been shown to lead to increases in health costs to the patient. A delay risks problems with nutrition, especially for children. It’s important to have an accurate diagnosis of food allergy so an allergist can make a clear recommendation as to what foods you need to keep out of your diet. And if no allergy exists, that clears the way to reintroduce foods you may have thought were off-limits.”

Diagnosing food allergy is not always simple, but the need to make a proper diagnosis is very important.

Allergists are specially trained to administer allergy testing and diagnose the results. They can then tailor a plan specific to your allergies. To find an allergist near you, use the [ACAAI allergist locator](#).



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THE BEST WAY TO DIAGNOSE A FOOD ALLERGY

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FRIDAY, Sept. 8, 2017 (HealthDay News) -- Diagnosing a food allergy isn't always simple, but the best way to do it is through an oral food challenge, according to a new study.

"It's important to have an accurate diagnosis of food allergy so an allergist can make a clear recommendation as to what foods you need to keep out of your diet," said study senior author and allergist Dr. Carla Davis.

"And if no allergy exists, that clears the way to reintroduce foods you may have thought were off-limits," said Davis, an associate professor of pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

During an oral food challenge, patients are asked to eat a very small amount of a suspected allergen while under the close supervision of a specially trained doctor, called an allergist. This doctor will evaluate the person for signs of an allergic reaction.

Researchers who analyzed more than 6,300 oral food challenges found these tests were safe and caused very few people to have a serious allergic reaction. Most of these tests involved children and teens younger than 18.

Of these cases, 14 percent resulted in a mild to moderate reaction that involved just one part of the body, such as a skin rash. The researchers noted that 2 percent resulted in very severe reactions that affected multiple body systems (anaphylaxis).

The results were published Sept. 7 in the journal *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*.

"Oral food challenges are a very important tool for anyone who wants to know if they have a food allergy," said study lead author Dr. Kwei Akuete, an allergist at Texas Children's Hospital in Houston. "Our study showed [oral food challenges] are safer than prior studies estimated, and should be routinely used to help determine if a food allergy exists."

Making a food allergy diagnosis is very important for people's health and quality of life, the study authors said.

"Food challenges improve the quality of life for people with food allergies, even if they are positive," Davis said in a journal news release. Delaying a diagnosis can lead to increased health costs to the patient and raise the risk for nutrition problems, especially for children, she added.

More information

The American Academy of Pediatrics has more on [food allergies in children](#).

SOURCE: American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, news release, Sept. 7, 2017



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