

# Information for children and their parents or carers about food challenges



## **Specialist Support**

If you require this leaflet in another language, large print or another format, please contact the Health Information Centre Tel: (023) 9228 6757, who will advise you.





We hope that the following information will help you as a family to prepare for your child's admission to the children's assessment unit.

### **What is a food challenge?**

A food challenge is when a certain food, which we suspect your child may be allergic to is fed to your child under close medical supervision. This is done by gradually giving bigger doses of the suspected food, over a certain amount of time, until a reaction occurs or the 'top dose' is eaten without any adverse reaction. The 'top dose' is what a child would be expected to eat in a normal portion.

### **What are the benefits of having a food challenge?**

A food challenge will confirm whether your child has a food allergy or not. Dependent on the outcome of the challenge, the particular food can be introduced into your child's diet. This may help you and your family lead a more normal life, without fear of your child reacting to a certain food.

If you find that as a result of the food challenge your child is allergic to a particular food, you will then be able to exclude that food from your child's diet and pass this information on to your child's school or nursery.

### **Are there any risks associated with having a food challenge?**

There is a potential risk that your child will have a reaction to the food they are being challenged to. This is why the food challenge is done in a hospital setting. Your child will be closely observed by a nurse who will monitor him/her for any signs of allergic reaction, such as an itchy rash, vomiting, puffy lips or breathing difficulties. A doctor will always be available if needed.

If your child does have an allergic reaction, the food challenge will be stopped. A relevant medicine will be given to relieve the symptoms and to stop the reaction from getting worse – this may be an antihistamine or in a severe reaction, adrenaline may be given.

### **What should I do if I have a problem?**

You may choose for your child not to have a food challenge and continue to avoid the food your child may be allergic to. Your child may grow out of an allergy, however, a food challenge is the only safe and definitive way to find out whether your child has a food allergy or not.

### **What should I do to prepare my child for the food challenge?**

Preparing your child for their visit to hospital will help them understand what is happening. Talking to your child in advance will give them time to ask any questions or voice any concerns they may have. Children tend to be more co-operative when they know what is happening to them.

Use familiar words that your child will understand and give truthful, factual information. Although there are toys and books on the ward you may wish to bring something familiar from home to help your child feel at ease while they are with us. As the challenge may take up to five hours, your child can eat and drink as usual during the challenge, please bring a packed lunch to eat if your child has lots of allergies, otherwise food will be provided on the ward.

You will also be asked to bring the food your child is being challenged to. This will be discussed in detail by the nurse who will contact you to arrange the challenge.

Please do not give antihistamines for three days prior to the test, as this may mask a reaction. If you do need to give your child antihistamine in this time, due to a reaction, please contact us as the food challenge will need to be re-arranged.

### **What happens during the food challenge?**

On arrival your child will be seen by a nurse who will take your child's weight and height. Their temperature, pulse and blood pressure will also be taken and we will continue to monitor these throughout the day. The food challenge procedure will be explained to you and your child, including the risks and benefits. You will then be asked to sign a consent form. Please do not hesitate to ask the nurses or doctors any questions you may have.

Your child will be given increasing amounts of the food they are being challenged to and this varies according to each food. The food will be given at 20 minute intervals. It may be necessary to hide the 'challenge' food in a food familiar to your child to make sure he/she eats the required amount. Please bring some of your child's favourite foods with you for this purpose. Your child will be checked for signs of an allergic reaction before each dose of food is given.

If your child has an allergic reaction at any point during the challenge, it will be stopped immediately. We will treat your child according to the reaction and your child will be monitored until the reaction settles and you are able to go home.

### **What happens after the food challenge?**

What happens next depends on whether your child receives a positive or negative test result.

- **A positive challenge result**

This is when your child reacts to any of the doses of food given. A positive reaction means your child is allergic and needs to strictly avoid that food. The doctors and nurses will treat the reaction as needed and your child will be monitored for 2-4 hours after a reaction. Occasionally, children may need to be observed for a longer period and therefore may need to stay in hospital overnight.

- **A negative challenge result**

This is when no reaction occurs to any of the doses of food. Your child will need to stay with us for two hours after the final dose of food is given to make sure there is no delayed reaction.

Your child will then need to eat a portion of this food 2-3 times a week in their diet or the reaction may return. More information will be given about this on the day.

### **Follow up**

Your consultant will be informed about the outcome of the challenge and a follow up will be arranged as necessary.

Please feel free to ask any questions you may have at any time during your visit. If you have any questions before your visit please phone CAU on 023 9228 3346 they will take a message and we can phone you back.

## **Consent - What does this mean?**

Before any health professional examines or treats you they must have **your consent or permission**. Consent may be implied (e.g. offering a wrist for taking a pulse) or written (where you sign a form agreeing the treatment/operation).

Young people are presumed to be able to give consent depending on their maturity and the nature of the decision. Where a child is not competent to give consent, only a person (or body) with parental responsibility may consent on the child's behalf. More detailed information is available [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

## **Information we hold about you and your rights under the Data Protection Act**

Please refer to the booklet 'Your Healthcare Information – Your Rights! Our Responsibilities!' for further guidance.

## **How to comment on your treatment**

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer your questions. However, if you have any concerns you can also contact the Patient Experience Service on 0800 917 6039 or E-mail: [portsmouthhospitals.patientexperience@porthosp.nhs.uk](mailto:portsmouthhospitals.patientexperience@porthosp.nhs.uk)

**Visit our website at [www.porthosp.nhs.uk](http://www.porthosp.nhs.uk)  
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