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## **Egg allergy**

### **What is egg allergy?**

Egg allergy is caused by an allergic reaction to egg protein. This protein is found mostly in the egg white but also in the yolk. It is common in children under 5 years and usually first noticed in infancy when egg is introduced into the diet for the first time. It is rare for egg allergy to develop in adulthood. Those who develop egg allergy as adults may also be allergic to birds or feathers which contain a protein that is similar to that found in egg yolk.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Commonly infants refuse the egg-containing food, develop redness and sometimes swelling around the mouth soon after skin contact and then vomit after eating. Stomach ache or diarrhea may also occur. Some children also develop a more severe reaction with cough, an asthma-type wheeze or even anaphylaxis. Further reactions do not, as a rule, become increasingly severe unless a greater amount or a less well-cooked form is eaten. Accidental skin contact usually only causes a rash but no generalised or dangerous symptoms; severe reactions rarely occur unless egg is eaten.

### **Will the allergy resolve?**

Egg allergy will resolve in most children, usually by school age. Generally, as they grow out of it, children tolerate well-baked egg (e.g. cakes) first, followed by lightly cooked (e.g. scrambled eggs) before finally being able to eat raw egg. Children who have had more severe reactions (e.g. with wheezing) may take longer to grow out of their allergy and in some cases egg allergy will persist.

### **How is egg allergy diagnosed?**

The diagnosis of egg allergy is based on the history of previous reactions, and can be confirmed by skin tests or blood tests.

### **What is the treatment?**

The best current treatment is to avoid all food containing egg. Egg may be found in a wide range of foods, including: cakes, pastries, desserts, meat products, salad dressings, glazes, pasta, battered and bread crumbed foods, ice cream, chocolates and sweets. It may also be referred to by unusual terms especially on imported foods e.g. egg lecithin or albumen (=egg white). The proteins in eggs from other birds are very similar to those in hens' eggs and should be avoided too.

If you are provided with an Epinephrine auto-injector (like EpiPen) your doctor will show you how to use it and provide a treatment plan. You should advise others, e.g. nursery/school teachers and grandparents about the treatment plan. You should also provide emergency medication for your child's school or nursery which your doctor can prescribe.

Your doctor may want to perform an allergy test on your child's blood or skin (these tests are safe), or may ask you to begin introducing well cooked egg at home. If your child has had more severe reactions involving wheezing, the decision whether to reintroduce egg will be made by an allergy specialist, DO NOT attempt this at home on your own.

### **Can my child have their routine immunisations?**

All children with egg allergy should receive their normal childhood immunisations, including the measles, mumps and rubella vaccination (MMR) as a routine procedure performed by their family doctor/nurse. MMR is *NOT* grown on hen's egg, as widely believed. Studies on large numbers of egg allergic children show there is no increased risk of severe allergic reactions to the vaccine.

### **What about other Immunisations?**

Influenza vaccine may contain very small amounts of egg protein. There is a very little risk of anaphylaxis in people with severe egg allergy. Usually you will need to wait at your clinic for 30 minutes after the flu vaccination.

Yellow fever vaccine and some Rabies vaccines contain measurable amounts of egg protein and people with egg allergy who need it should be seen by an allergy specialist.

### **Can I continue to breast feed my baby?**

If you are breastfeeding, any food proteins, such as egg, will also be present in your breast milk. If your baby is well, with no allergic symptoms, then it is fine for you to eat egg as usual. If your baby has symptoms, such as hives, which may be due to an allergy to the egg in your milk, then it may be worthwhile removing egg from your own diet for a couple of weeks to see whether your baby's symptoms improve. If there is no improvement in your baby's condition, then eggs can be re-introduced back into your diet.

### **Does egg allergy mean my child is at risk of other allergies?**

Most children with egg allergy will already have a history of eczema. Egg allergy also increases the risk of developing asthma later in childhood, but not in all children. Allergies to other foods are more common in egg-allergic children.

### **I have another child/infant to whom I have not given egg. When should it be introduced into their diet?**

There is no evidence to suggest that delaying the introduction of egg beyond 6 months will reduce the chance of your child developing egg allergy.

**You can find this hand out among other allergy info on my website: [www.doctorahmed.ca](http://www.doctorahmed.ca)**