

### **What is an oral food challenge (OFC)?**

An **oral food challenge** is a procedure performed under medical supervision in which a food is eaten slowly, in gradually increasing amounts. Performing an OFC will show whether or not eating a specific food will cause an allergic reaction. This helps accurately diagnose or rule out a true food allergy.

### **What are the reasons to perform an OFC?**

When a person's clinical history and allergy testing are unclear, the OFC is considered the definitive or "gold-standard" test for food allergy.

### **What are the benefits?**

If the food is successfully eaten without symptoms you can expand your child's diet knowing that it is safe. This means they can enjoy the nutritional and social benefits that accompany flexible eating. However, if the food did trigger a reaction, the benefit is knowing that the food is truly a problem and needs to be avoided for your health and safety.

### **What are the risks?**

The risks of OFC include an allergic reaction, possibly with **anaphylaxis** (a quick and possibly fatal allergic reaction). OFCs are performed in a clinical setting under the supervision of medical providers. They are well-prepared and trained to address any symptoms or issues during your child's procedure.

**Note:** There is no evidence that having an allergic reaction during an OFC makes future reactions worse, or prolongs allergy in children.

## **What is the usual treatment in case of an allergic reaction during an oral food challenge?**

Most food challenges trigger a skin reaction or gastrointestinal symptoms. These symptoms are usually mild because the challenge is done gradually with small amounts of food at the start, and feeding is stopped when symptoms start. Most often, **antihistamines** (drugs that relieve allergy symptoms) are given for these mild symptoms.

If there are more severe symptoms, treatments can include **epinephrine** (a medicine used for life-threatening allergic reactions) and other medications.

## **What do I need to do to prepare for an oral food challenge?**

- You will be contacted by our Food Allergy nurse 7-14 days before your child's OFC appointment to review OFC information and answer any questions.
- Your child should be in good health on the day of the food challenge. **If they are sick on the day of the test, postpone it.**
- Chronic conditions such as asthma, atopic dermatitis (eczema), and allergic rhinitis (hay fever) must be well controlled so they do not interfere with the interpretation of any symptoms noted during the OFC.
- Bring your child's usual medications and emergency medications (epinephrine) to have available for the trip to the doctor and back.

## **Does my child have to stop any medications before having an OFC?**

Yes. They have to stop antihistamines before the OFC since they might cover up mild early symptoms. Ask your doctor how long they need to stop the type of antihistamine they are using. It may be difficult to stop allergy

medications during an allergy season, or if they have significant eczema. Therefore, plan the OFC during the seasons that cause the least problems.

In the 1-2-week period before the OFC, you may use alternative medications, such as intranasal steroids or leukotriene antagonists. This could help minimize the discomfort caused by stopping antihistamines.

**If your child needs asthma rescue medications around the time of the test, you should postpone.** However, **never** avoid using a needed emergency treatment such as epinephrine, antihistamines or inhaled asthma rescue medications just because you have an OFC scheduled. Treat the problem and postpone the test.

### **Who provides the food?**

Some foods may be provided by the clinic, or you may need to prepare food at home and bring it in. You will be contacted by our Food Allergy nurse ahead of time to review this.

Discuss your child's food preferences. For infants, younger children, or picky eaters, you may need to bring several food options to minimize the possibility that a picky eater refuses food. Bring favorite serving dishes and utensils, and distractions such as toys, books, or homework.

### **What happens on the day of the test?**

1. Your child may need to avoid food or have a light meal before starting.
2. A physical examination and vital signs are done before starting and periodically during the test.
3. The OFC starts with a small serving of the food and a 15-20-minute wait, if no symptoms are present, your child eats a slightly larger amount.

4. Before each dose, careful evaluation is done to look for any symptoms. If symptoms occur and the medical staff see a reaction happening, the feeding is stopped and medications are given as needed. Otherwise, the feeding continues until a typical portion is eaten.

### **How long do I have to stay after the last challenge dose is given?**

If **no symptoms develop** during the procedure, your child is monitored for 1 hour after discharge from the office. If **symptoms do develop**, they are typically watched for at least 1 to 2 hours from the time symptoms go away or improve. Longer observation periods are required for people with more severe reactions.

### **What are the post-test instructions?**

When you return home, have your child do the following:

- Avoid any further exposure to the challenge food for the remainder of the day
- Avoid exercise for at least 2-4 hours
- If the OFC did not cause symptoms, start consuming the challenge food regularly at home **the following day**. You will receive post-challenge instructions on how to reintroduce the food at home before discharge from the office. The food can become a routine part of their diet. Having symptoms after they “pass” an OFC is not common.
- If the OFC resulted in an allergic reaction, then continue to avoid the food.

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