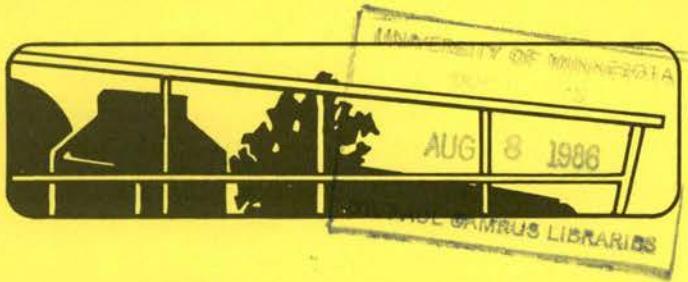


young families

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Food Allergies

Food allergies are not as common as other allergies, such as hay fever or asthma. It is estimated that less than one percent of all people are allergic to food. Food allergies are more common in children than in adults, occurring most often in children between two months and three years of age. Children born to allergic parents are much more likely to develop food allergies.

Babies and children are more apt to have reactions to food than adults because their intestines are not as well developed, and some food proteins which would not be absorbed by an adult get into the child's bloodstream. Allergist and immunologist Alan C. Bock describes this as a "leaky gut" in his book, *Food Allergy—A Primer for People*.

Symptoms of Food Allergies

An allergic reaction may occur in the intestine, causing cramps, diarrhea, or vomiting, or on the skin, causing rashes or itching. Childhood symptoms mistakenly attributed to food allergies include chronic nasal congestion (stuffy nose), long-term asthma, chronic ear infections, fatigue, and behavior changes such as hyperactivity and irritability. These symptoms have not yet been proven to be caused by a food allergy.

It is important to understand that a child's misbehavior usually is not due to food allergies, sugar, food additives, or any of a number of other food-related causes. Before denying your youngster any food that you think makes the child misbehave, check with a doctor about other possible causes. Children need a wide variety of food. Prohibiting nourishing foods needlessly will not teach them good nutrition and most likely will not improve their behavior.

Diagnosis of Food Allergies

Diagnosis of a food allergy should be done by a medical doctor, preferably one who specializes in allergies. The doctor should be a member of a professional society such as the American Academy of Allergy and Immunology. Contact your county medical society for the names of physicians.

The doctor may perform several tests to determine if certain symptoms are caused by a food substance. The most common test is the elimination-challenge test in which the common allergy-causing foods (milk, eggs, beans, nuts, wheat, fish, citrus fruits, and crustaceans) are eliminated from the diet for several weeks. Then the allergic person is "challenged" by introducing these foods back into the diet, one at a time, to see if the symptoms recur.

Another test, called a double-blind challenge test or DBCT, is the most unbiased test. Neither the patient nor the one

observing the reaction knows when the patient receives the challenge.

Reliable allergy tests include skin tests which check the reaction to food extracts applied under the skin, and the radioallergosorbent test (RAST), which checks the blood for antibodies. Unreliable food allergy tests include cytotoxic food tests (also known as Bryan's test, leukocyte antigen testing, and food sensitivity testing) and sublingual provocative food tests (under the tongue).

Preventing Allergic Reactions

If your child has a properly diagnosed allergy, the only way to prevent a reaction is to not allow your child to eat that food. Try to help your child understand why certain foods are prohibited by using simple language to explain what happens when the food is eaten. It is also helpful if the family avoids eating the problem food in the child's presence.

Most allergies to food do not last forever. In children it may be possible to reintroduce the food in six months or so. Check with your doctor first.

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 Extension Nutritionist

(Adapted from "Food Allergy and You," by William D. Evers, North Central Regional Extension Publication No. 239.)

Travel Tips

If you are planning a trip this summer, here are some ideas to help make the time on the road more enjoyable for you and your children.

- Prepare children ahead of time so they know what is expected. But don't give the trip too much of a buildup or they may get overly keyed up.
- Obtain a guidebook to attractions in the area. Let children help decide destinations and activities.
- Take time to get to your destination. Allow plenty of time for restroom and drinking stops. On long trips, an overnight stop at a motel with a swimming pool or playground will help relax everybody.
- Don't expect children to sit still for long periods of time.
- Don't get upset by a limited amount of tussling among children. If you don't let it get to you, it will be less of a problem for everyone.
- Take a small tricycle on long trips and let your child work off some energy at frequent stops.
- Surprise your children with new toys to play with, specially selected for the trip. Perhaps you can work out a toy swap with a friend instead of actually buying all new toys.
- Fill small containers with trinkets, such as old jewelry, card games, and balloons.
- Keep extra clothing handy in case food and drinks get spilled.
- Keep a wet washcloth handy in a plastic bag.

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Fussy Eaters

Parents are often disturbed by their children's eating habits, especially the "fussy eater"—the child who refuses to eat certain types of food or who just doesn't seem to eat enough. Although children eventually outgrow many of their aversions to food, it can take a long time. You will need to be patient and flexible.

Offer Small Portions

A parent who asks, "How can I get my child to eat?" may really be asking, "How can I get my child to eat *like me*?" Most parents tend to view their child's eating habits through "adult-colored glasses"—they expect the child to eat the same amount and types of food that they eat. One simple way to reduce conflicts with your child over food is to remember this basic rule: children should eat child-sized portions of food.

Meats and Vegetables

Sometimes there are specific foods that even very young children refuse to eat. If your toddler doesn't like to eat meat, try offering well-cooked, tender meats. Milk, cheese, yogurt, peanut butter, and eggs are all good sources of protein and can be substituted for meat. Bread, cereal, pasta, and vegetables also contain some protein.

Perhaps the most common concern expressed by parents is that their children won't eat vegetables. Try offering vegetables in a different form, for instance, diced instead of sliced. Or offer a new vegetable. Many children enjoy raw or lightly cooked vegetables served with a dip. It may also help if you serve the vegetables at the start of the meal when the child is hungriest. And remember, you can also serve fruits, like peaches and apricots, which have some of the same nutrients as the vegetables your child dislikes.

Be Patient and Flexible

As a toddler grows older and becomes a preschooler, the problem of finicky or fussy eating may not lessen. In fact, preschoolers aged four to six are notorious for their strange (by their parents' standards) eating habits. The best advice to parents is to accept the fact that some children are finicky eaters and that there is no real cause for concern unless your child appears unhealthy.

Ask your child to list or identify all foods he or she likes. You could use this list to provide a substitute for a dinner item the child will not eat. It might also be wise to require your child to eat at least three different foods at each meal—this allows for variety and can incorporate your child's food choices.

Perhaps the most important point to remember is that your attitude toward your child's eating habits may have an influence long after the early years and the eating problem have passed. So, if your child is a fussy eater, it pays to make an effort to be patient and flexible and use a lot of common sense.

For additional information, an excellent, easy-reading book is *No-Nonsense Nutrition for Kids* by Annette Natow and Jo-Ann Heslin, available in paperback.

Ellen Schuster
Extension Nutritionist

Misbehavior

Most parents spend a good amount of time attending to children when they misbehave. But when children behave well, parents often give them little attention. In most cases, it should be just the reverse.

An important rule of thumb concerning child behavior is "Reward the good and ignore the bad." When children behave well, let them know you're pleased. If they know you are pleased, they're more likely to continue being good.

Take a Positive Approach

Tell your children what they *can* do instead of what they can't. Young children often don't realize they are misbehaving. For example, a toddler may pull another child's hair or knock over a playmate's block tower and not understand that he or she is doing something wrong. Suggest an acceptable behavior to replace an unwanted one: "Susan doesn't want you to knock over her tower. Here are some more blocks. You can build your own tower and knock it over."

Ignore Bad Behavior

Sometimes you can stop a child's misbehavior simply by ignoring it. Ignoring bad behavior means paying no attention to it at all. Be neither positive nor negative. Don't scold, don't laugh, don't even look at the child. Of course, there are some misbehaviors you won't be able to ignore, but it won't matter that you don't step in as long as they're not harming themselves, other children, or the house. For example, when a child cries or throws a temper tantrum to get your attention, it doesn't harm anybody if you ignore it.

If you ignore the misbehavior every time it occurs and don't give in, your child's behavior will improve. Be patient—ignoring bad behavior may take awhile to have an effect. In fact, you can probably expect behavior to get worse before it starts getting better.

Try to accentuate the positive. As soon as the child's behavior improves, give attention and show appreciation. Give rewards for good behavior, such as smiles, hugs, kind words, and compliments. The day will pass more pleasantly if you take a positive approach.

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This Issue

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