



The Anaphylaxis campaign
Helping people with severe allergies live their lives

New study aims to reduce allergy in children

A UK medical team has launched a study to test the hypothesis that the early introduction of certain allergenic foods into infants' diets may stop them developing allergy to those foods.

The team is recruiting babies whose mothers plan to exclusively breast feed for at least the first three months. Babies taking part will be recruited from the general UK population and placed at random in one of two groups:

- One group will introduce six allergenic foods from three months of age alongside continued breastfeeding, having been screened to check for pre-existing food allergy (the intervention arm).
- The other group will follow present UK weaning advice, i.e. aim for exclusive breastfeeding for around six months (the control arm).

The babies will be monitored over three years to see whether the early introduction of these allergenic foods into the infants diet has an effect on reducing the prevalence of food allergy.

Mothers of infants in the intervention group will be asked to breastfeed until their child is at least six months of age. They will also introduce first some baby rice and then cow's milk based yoghurt from three months. Afterwards they will be asked to introduce other foods in defined quantities – peanut butter, fish, wheat, eggs and sesame. By five months, as well as being breastfed, the child will be eating these foods twice a week.

The study, which is called EAT (“Enquiring About Tolerance”), aims to enrol 2,500 mothers and infants at three months of age. Funding is being provided by the Food Standards Agency and Medical Research Council.

EAT will follow the same basic hypothesis as that proposed by the LEAP study (“Learning Early About Peanut Allergies”). But whereas LEAP is focusing on peanut allergy in high-risk children (i.e. those who already have egg allergy and/or eczema), EAT is looking at the introduction of a wider range of foods in the general population. Both studies are being conducted by the allergy team at the Evelina Children's Hospital, London. Further information:

www.eatstudy.co.uk

www.leapstudy.co.uk

Change in Government advice

A recent change in Government advice to mothers reflects the fact that clear scientific knowledge about the optimum time to introduce allergenic foods into infants' diets in order to prevent allergy is lacking.

Previous Government guidance issued to women in 1998 said they “may wish” to avoid peanuts during pregnancy and while breastfeeding if there is allergy in the immediate family. The guidelines also stated that peanuts should not be introduced into the diet of these children until three years of age. The advice was precautionary and was based on the evidence available at that time.

The latest review carried out by the independent Committee on Toxicity shows there is now no clear evidence that eating or not eating peanuts during those early stages influences the chances of a child developing peanut allergy. Revised advice has now been issued by the Food Standards Agency and Department of Health.

During pregnancy and while breastfeeding: The revised advice states that if mothers would like to eat peanuts during pregnancy or breastfeeding, they can do so as part of a balanced diet, irrespective of whether or not their child has a family history of allergies.

When introducing peanut into a child’s diet: Government guidance advising all mothers to try to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of life remains unchanged. The revised advice states that if mothers choose to start giving their baby solid foods before six months, they should not introduce peanuts or other allergenic foods (such as other nuts, seeds, milk, eggs, wheat, fish or shellfish) before this time. And when they do so, these foods should be introduced one at a time so they can spot any allergic reaction.

The full text of the revised advice is available at:

www.food.gov.uk/safereating/allergyintol/peanutspregnancy