

## Egg allergy

### *Introduction*

Hens' egg allergy is relatively common in children under five. The child may also have eczema as well as other food allergies besides egg allergy. Some children suffer chronic eczema without realising that egg is causing or exacerbating the problem. About 80 per cent of children outgrow their egg allergy.

### *Severe egg allergy*

The symptoms of severe egg allergy normally begin within seconds or minutes of ingestion, but occasionally within the hour. Tiny amounts of egg may cause a reaction and extreme symptoms may include swelling of the airways, severe asthma or even – in rare cases – anaphylactic shock. Some very sensitive people may even suffer breathing problems when they inhale the fumes of cooked eggs, and skin contact with egg may result in a rash.

Any parent who is worried about the severity of their child's egg allergy should seek their G.P.'s advice. Severe cases should be referred to an NHS allergy clinic. Your GP or consultant will make a diagnosis based on history of previous reactions. The allergy can be confirmed by blood tests to measure the allergy antibody, and/or skin prick tests. People at risk of severe reactions are normally prescribed pre-loaded adrenaline (in EpiPen or Anapen form).

Some egg-allergic children can eat well-cooked egg (in cake, for example) but not raw or lightly cooked egg. These are the ones who are more likely to grow out of egg allergy. Others are allergic even to well-cooked egg and these are the ones for whom egg allergy is more likely to be severe and maybe lifelong.

Children who have egg allergy, and particularly those whose egg allergy lasts for more than a year, have a high risk of developing allergy to inhalants and, therefore, developing allergic rhinitis (hayfever), or asthma, or both.

### *Dietary management of egg allergy*

Foods that contain egg may include any of the following: cakes, pastries, desserts, meat products, salad dressings, glazes, pasta, battered and bread crumbed foods, ice cream, chocolates and sweets. This list is not exhaustive and food labels must be thoroughly scrutinised every time you shop.

The emulsifier known as lecithin (E322) may be derived from egg, although this is rare. Soya is a more common source of lecithin. Egg lecithin may be present occasionally in pharmaceutical products. Your pharmacist should be able to supply information about any medicines you are prescribed.

Watch out for the word albumen, which also denotes the presence of egg. Lysozyme is an enzyme that may be derived from egg white. It may trigger symptoms in a small percentage of people with egg allergy.

Lists of egg-free foods can be obtained directly from many food manufacturers and supermarket chains. They are very helpful in the day-to-day management of the diet. In addition, the Leatherhead Food Intolerance Databank holds details about the ingredients of many foods. To access this information you need to see a State Registered Dietitian. Ask your GP to refer you.

# The Anaphylaxis Campaign

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## ***Food labelling***

Under new legislation all food companies throughout the EU are being compelled to label major allergens such as egg, milk and nuts whenever they appear. Food companies have until November 2005 to comply, but all food packaged before that date may remain on the shelves until the end of its shelf life. Fortunately many UK food companies are already changing their labelling in line with the new requirements.

## ***The MMR Vaccine***

The MMR vaccine is normally cultured on egg fibroblast. Anaphylactic reactions to the MMR have been reported, but these are very rare, and in any case may have been triggered by another component of the vaccine. There is no evidence that people with egg allergy are any more likely to have a reaction to the MMR than those who do not have egg allergy. However, any person who has severe allergy problems – irrespective of whether this is due to egg or not – should be advised to have the MMR administered in hospital where full treatment is available should a reaction occur.

## ***The flu vaccine***

Anyone who has ever been egg allergic is usually advised not to have the flu injection because of possible egg contamination from the culture medium. Very occasionally, when flu injections are considered essential in the young or old, these must be given in hospital.

## ***The yellow fever vaccine***

Yellow fever vaccine is a definite contra-indication in an egg allergic person.

## ***Eggs from other birds***

People who react to chicken's eggs are advised not to eat eggs from duck, goose or quail because they may react to any egg.

- *Suggested reading: "Baking Without Eggs and Stress", by Julia McMaster. Contains egg and dairy free recipes for cakes, pastries, flapjacks biscuits and bread etc. Send a cheque for £5.00 made out to Julia McMaster to 65 Sion Hill, Castlebar, Co Mayo, Ireland. This cost includes postage and packaging.*

*This fact sheet is based on information available at the time of going to press but may be subject to change. Remember too that all of us are different and individual cases require individual medical attention. Please be guided by your GP or consultant.*

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