

Oral food challenge

What is a food challenge?

A food challenge is a medical procedure during which a food is eaten slowly, in gradually increasing amounts, with 15 minute intervals, under close supervision.

In between each dose the temperature, pulse rate, heart rate, blood pressure and oxygen levels are measured. This way, reactions can be picked up early and treated appropriately.

Why do a food challenge?

A food challenge is done either when allergy tests are inconclusive, or in order to know when a child has outgrown their food allergy.

How long will it take?

Food challenges take approximately 4 hours. If there is a reaction to the food it may take longer. If there is a very serious reaction, it may be best to stay in hospital overnight. This is very rare.

How to prepare?

Your child must be 100% healthy; if not, please postpone the challenge.

Bring your child's usual medications and emergency medications, including epipens.

Antihistamines should be stopped for 5 days and Montelukast for 24hours.

Give only a very light breakfast in the morning before the procedure, but bring your child's regular milk and favourite foods along.

Bring your child's own bowls and utensils as well as toys, games, homework and other distractions.

What are the risks?

The risk is having an allergic reaction, even anaphylaxis. The risk of having a mild reaction is about 25-50% and the risk of a severe reaction is about 2-10%.

What are the benefits?

It is important to be able to reintroduce foods into the diet if possible, both for social as well as health reasons. It is a way of avoiding unnecessary dietary restrictions. It is also useful in making a definitive diagnosis of food allergy where the symptoms or tests may have been unclear.