



ORAL FOOD CHALLENGE

What is an oral food challenge?

An oral food challenge, is a medical procedure in which a food is eaten slowly, in gradually increasing amounts, under medical supervision, to accurately diagnose or rule out a true food allergy.

What are the reasons to perform an oral food challenge?

Oral challenges are usually done after allergy tests have been completed, such as skin and blood tests, and a careful medical history has been performed. The oral challenge is a more definitive test, because it will show whether the food ingested produces no symptoms or whether it triggers a reaction.

What do I need to do in preparation to have an oral challenge?

You need to be in good health on the day of the test and prior to the challenge. Chronic allergic conditions such as asthma, atopic dermatitis (eczema) and allergic rhinitis (hay fever) have to be well controlled so they do not interfere with the interpretation of any symptoms. If you are sick on the day of the test or prior to testing, please call our office to confirm, because we may need to postpone the testing. You should also carry your usual medications and emergency medications with you so you have them for the trip to the doctor and back.

Do I have to stop any medications before having an oral challenge?

Yes. Antihistamines have to be stopped 4 days before the challenge, since they might mask mild early symptoms. Please see the complete list of antihistamine medications on our website. It may be difficult to stop allergy medications during an allergy season or in patients with significant eczema, therefore these oral challenges may need to be timed to avoid the seasons that cause problems.

Who provides the food?

You will need to bring the specific food item with you to this appointment. Please talk to your physician/nurse about food options to bring, as some foods are cross-contaminated. Discuss your child's food preferences. For infants, younger children or picky eaters, you may need to have several food options ready to minimize the possibility of food refusal for a picky eater. For example, peanut may be eaten as peanuts, peanut butter, peanut butter powder, etc.

For children, bring favorite serving dishes and utensils, other snacks/drinks that they have previously eaten, and any distractions such as toys, books, or homework.

What happens on the day of the test?

Please arrive 15 minutes early to your scheduled appointment so we can begin on time. You should eat a normal meal before coming into our office for the oral challenge, but please do not have a full stomach. For children, a light meal might be most appropriate, so they will be able to eat the full food serving provided during the challenge. A

physical examination and vital signs are done before starting and throughout the test. The oral challenge starts with a small serving of the food and after a period of time, usually 15-20 minutes, if no symptoms are present, a slightly larger amount is eaten.

Before each subsequent dose, careful evaluation is performed to look for any symptoms. If symptoms occur, and the medical personnel judge that a reaction is happening, the feeding is stopped and medications are given as needed. Otherwise, the feeding continues until, typically, a serving sized portion is eaten.

What is the usual treatment in case of an allergic reaction during the challenge?

Most food challenges that result in a reaction trigger skin or stomach symptoms. The symptoms are usually mild because the testing is done gradually with small amounts of food at the start, and feeding is stopped at the onset of symptoms. Most often, antihistamines are given for these mild symptoms. If there are more severe symptoms, treatments can include epinephrine and other medications.

How long do I have to stay after the feeding is over?

If there were no symptoms during an oral challenge, usually patients are discharged from the office within 2 to 3 hours of completing the feeding. In the case of allergic symptoms, the patient is typically watched for a longer observation period.

What are the post-test instructions?

If the oral food challenge did not cause symptoms, the patient is recommended to start regular consumption of the challenge food at home the following day. It is usually advised to make the food a routine part of the diet. Having symptoms after a “passed” oral challenge is uncommon.

If the oral food challenge resulted in an allergic reaction, then continued avoidance is recommended.

What are the oral challenge risks?

The risks of an oral challenge include an allergic reaction and anaphylaxis, which is treated with epinephrine and other medications. There is no evidence that having an allergic reaction during an oral challenge makes future reactions worse or prolongs allergy in children.

What are the benefits?

The benefits include the nutritional and social benefits of being able to expand the diet if the food is successfully eaten without symptoms. However, even if the food triggered a reaction, the benefit is knowing that the food is truly a problem and needs to be avoided to maintain safety and health.

Updated on 2020-1-17 from <https://www.aaaai.org>