

Paediatric allergy

Introducing a new food at home

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet explains how you can safely introduce a food to your child at home that we have determined they are probably NOT allergic to (they tolerate it). Please read all the information below before starting. If you are a child or young person reading this information, we mean you when we say 'your child'.

Checklist before introducing the food at home

1. Make sure your **child is well**:
 - they don't have an infective illness e.g. cough, cold, fever, diarrhoea, vomiting
 - if their asthma, eczema, hay fever is flaring, treat this first.
2. Stop antihistamines (cetirizine, loratadine, fexofenadine, Piriton) ideally 3 days before you introduce the food. Don't use any antihistamines during the food introduction, if possible. Continue all other regular medications as usual.
3. **Stay with your child during the food introduction** (to monitor and support them) and for 2 hours after the final food portion.
4. If your child has an **allergy action plan and allergy medications** keep these with you.
5. **Prepare the food** in a way that your child will eat/enjoy.
 - think of how you can give the food to your child so they **enjoy eating it**, for example mixed with their favourite fruit, snack or drink
6. Introducing only **one new food at a time** helps increase your confidence that each food has been tolerated well. You might want to leave a gap of 2 to 3 days between introducing each new food.

How to introduce a new food at home

Choose one of the options below to introduce a new food to your child.

Generally, we recommend introducing the food in slowly increasing amounts. Then you can stop when you get to a **usual amount for your child**.

Option A

Give your child a small amount – about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the portion-size you would expect your child to eat. Once your child has eaten $\frac{1}{4}$ amount of the food, wait for 30 minutes. Then, if your child has not had an allergic reaction and wants more, give them the remainder of the portion. Then watch your child for a further 2 hours to confirm they don't have any reaction symptoms.

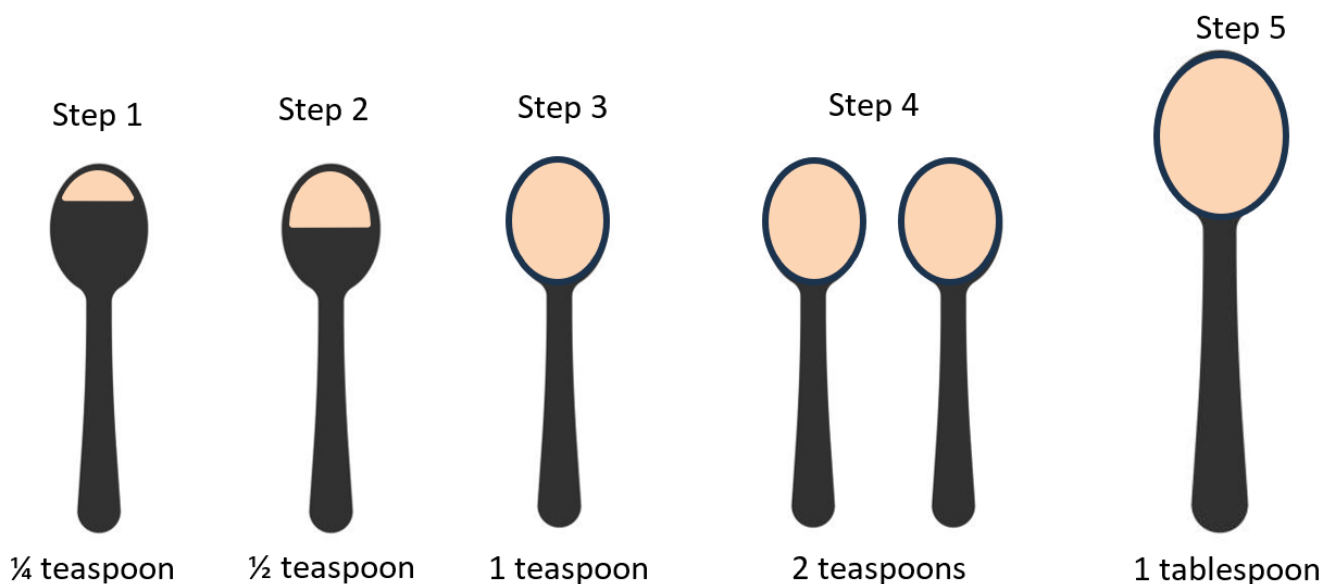
Option B

You can start with a smaller amount and slowly increase it. We call each small increase a 'step'. An example plan is $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon $\rightarrow$ $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon $\rightarrow$ 1 teaspoon $\rightarrow$ 2 teaspoons $\rightarrow$ 1 tablespoon (see figure below). After that, double the amount of food until they've eaten a usual portion size. You could do this:

- over 1 day** giving increasing amounts every 20 to 30 minutes OR
- over several days** (e.g. 1 week) increase by one or two steps per day. The days do not need to be consecutive.

Check your child tolerates each step before moving to the next step.

Watch your child for up to 2 hours after the final step of the day to make sure they don't have any reaction symptoms.



Tips for children with eczema or sensitive skin

Many children get mild itchy, red skin around their mouth when they eat certain foods even though they are **not allergic** to the food. This can happen more commonly if there is undertreated eczema around the mouth or in younger children. To stop this from happening during your food introduction:

- 1) Treat eczema well before introducing the new food.
- 2) Do not rub the food on the skin or around the mouth when you feed your child the new food. You can use a barrier cream (i.e. moisturiser cream/emollient) around their mouth to protect the skin before they start eating. Wipe the skin clean around your child's mouth after eating.

If there is a reaction...

Most children tolerate new foods without any problems and an allergic reaction is unlikely. The symptoms below are uncommon. We have included them for guidance and reassurance, so you'll know what to do if they happen.

Immediate reactions (within 2 hours of eating the food)

Possible symptoms (usually mild) can include: itchy or tingly mouth, swollen lips/face/eyes, hives or an itchy skin rash, or nausea or abdominal pain, mild throat tightness, vomit. More serious signs of reaction are rare and include difficulty or noisy breathing, or dizziness.

What to do:

- stop giving them the food
- follow your child's allergy action plan (if they have one)
- if your child has any serious symptoms (e.g. breathing difficulty, faintness), ring 999
- once your child has recovered, contact the allergy team (details below) to discuss whether and when to try the food introduction again

Delayed reactions (between 2 hours to 3 days after eating the food)

Possible symptoms can include: a flare of eczema, abdominal pain, constipation, or diarrhoea. These symptoms can often happen for other reasons in children, like a viral illness such as a tummy bug, rather than the new food. It's important you don't automatically assume it is food related.

What to do:

- if their symptoms are mild, wait for them to settle (typically within a week), then try the food introduction again

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- if their symptoms are bothering them, won't go away, or happen two separate times, stop trying to introduce the food – then ring the allergy team for advice (or wait at least six months to try again if we tell you to)

Following successful food introduction

If your child eats a typical portion size of the new food without an allergic reaction, **you can be confident they are not allergic to the food**. Then you should aim to **add the food into your child's diet regularly**. Try to find ways they can enjoy it with their usual meals or snacks.

Who to contact with questions or concerns

If you have any questions about home introduction, please ring the allergy team on **020 3312 1381**. The recording will ask you to leave a voice message. Then, the allergy team will get back to you within two to three working days.

Please note that this number is not for urgent healthcare queries. For urgent queries, contact 999 (for emergencies), 111 (for non-emergencies) or your GP, as appropriate.

Other useful contact numbers:

Paediatric allergy team (for allergy-related health queries): **020 3312 1381**

Paediatric allergy dietitians (for diet-related queries): **020 3312 1127**

Admin teams (for appointment-related queries)

• food/drug challenge appointments booking: **020 3311 6611**

• main reception (paediatric allergy, St Mary's Hospital): **020 3312 1381**

• outpatients department appointments (St Mary's Hospital): **020 3312 6315**

• outpatients department appointments (Hammersmith Hospital): **020 3313 4727**

Paediatric allergy secretaries (for letters/reports): **020 3312 1257**

How do I give feedback about my visit?

We want to hear your **suggestions** or **comments**. Your feedback helps us provide the best service. You can always speak to a member of staff.

You can also contact the **patient advice and liaison service (PALS)** on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 to 16.00, Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays) or email at imperial.pals@nhs.net. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or questions and they can help solve problems.

You can make a complaint by ringing **020 3312 1337 / 1349** or emailing tr.Complaints@nhs.net. The address is Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY.

Other ways to read this leaflet

Please email us at imperial.communications@nhs.net if you need this leaflet in a different format. This could be large print, Easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in a different language.

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

Paediatric allergy
Published: November 2025
Review date: November 2028
Reference no: 5320
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