



NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S
When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.

Helping Hand™

Health Education for Patients and Families

Food Allergy and Anxiety

Children may have anxiety about their food allergies. This can cause extreme fear and worry that may change your child's behavior. A little anxiety is healthy. It helps your child manage their food allergy. It can keep them safe as they check food labels, avoid what they are allergic to (allergen), wash their hands, and keep their epinephrine auto-injector nearby.

However, the anxiety can feel too big and get in the way of their daily lives. These worries about the food allergy may become distracting or upsetting. Your child may start avoiding places, activities, or situations they don't need to avoid.

Sign and Symptoms

If your child shows any of these signs, they may have anxiety about their food allergy:

- Spends a lot of time worrying about being around what they're allergic to.
- Checks or needs to be told their food is free from allergens often.
- Worries they have about allergies are inflated or not correct. For example, worrying about their allergen being in the air.
- Washes their hands a lot to prevent contact with the allergen.
- Avoids or tries to avoid school or social activities for fear of having an allergic reaction.
- Avoids or refuses to eat foods they're not allergic to. This could be because they're afraid that the food accidentally has their allergen in it, or that they may be allergic to those foods.
- Fears how their allergy is taken care of, like getting an epinephrine shot or doing their oral food challenges.

Treatment

Pediatric (pee-dee-**a**-truhk) psychologists work with children and families to help with the psychological aspects of medical conditions.

Therapy may include:

- Learning skills to challenge anxious thoughts.
- Learning relaxation skills to manage anxiety.
- Practicing coping skills while facing anxious situations your child normally avoids.
- Helping parents learn ways to support their child.
- Helping with other concerns, like your child's feelings about living with their allergy or handling difficult social situations.

Nationwide Children's Hospital Food Allergy Treatment Center has pediatric psychologists. They help children with food allergies. If you want to meet with a pediatric psychologist, ask your doctor or health care provider or call (614) 722-4700.