

## **WHY TEST FOR FOOD ALLERGIES?**

Allergic reactions to foods involve an over reaction by the body's immune system. The primary shock organ is the gastrointestinal tract, thus producing itchy throat, stomach cramping, diarrhea, or vomiting. Other symptoms like hives or wheezing also frequently occur.

Food allergies typically do not cause chronic ear or sinus problems such as fluid in the ear, ear infections, sinus infections or chronic asthma. Food allergies can contribute to skin conditions such as eczema and cause more serious reactions in truly allergic people. With blanket food testing you can get a lot of false positive test results. In other words testing 100 people can result in 10 to 30% showing false positive tests to foods that they eat all the time. All this means is they had an allergic predisposition to a food that they either never developed or outgrew. Adults or children who are tolerating all foods usually have no need for food testing.

Elimination diets do not result in improvement in asthma, chronic sinus or ear problems and there is no scientific/immunologic basis for such a diet.

The gold standard of allergy testing (for food or environmental allergies) as established by the American Board of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (a conjoint board of the American Board of Pediatrics and the American Board of Internal Medicine) is skin testing. This is typically considered to be more cost effective and sensitive than blood testing.

There is no scientific/immunologic basis for allergy shots or allergy drops under the tongue for food allergies. The only treatment for food allergies is avoidance of the food and using an Epi-pen after inadvertent ingestion followed by reaction.

At what age should a child be allergy tested for foods?

Typically skin testing to foods can be done at any age including infancy if indicated.

At what age should a child be allergy tested for things in the environment?

Children under the age of 2 typically do not have adequate exposure to allergens such as grasses, trees, etc. to show positive skin tests to indicate that they are allergic. Testing kids younger than 20-24 months is hence not typically indicated.

### **Questions to ask your allergy provider:**

- Is your doctor a member of the American Board of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (a conjoint board of ABP and ABIM), The American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology and the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology? (You can Google whether your doctor is board certified in this by going to <http://www.abms.org> which has a link to search for a particular board specialty.
- Has your doctor completed a 2 or 3 year training program otherwise referred to as a fellowship in Allergy, Asthma & Immunology and then taken the Allergy, Asthma & Immunology Board? That is what the term "board certified" in allergy truly means.