

General travel tips for children with nut allergies

No matter the mode of transportation, holiday travel holds special challenges for parents. Either you're stuck in an enormous security line at an airport filled with cranky people or hearing the constant stream of "are we there yet?" from the back seat of the car. It's enough to make a Scrooge out of even the most Tiny Tim of us. For many families adding to the chaos is the reality that their child has a dangerous nut allergy.



(Image: Wikimedia Commons)

"The best thing to do is plan ahead. Though you can't plan for everything being prepared will help keep your child safe and limit your holiday stress. We all know we have enough of it anyway," said Dr. Sean Cahill, associate professor of paediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

One of the most important tips is to keep your child's hands and the surfaces your child touches as clean as possible.

Research is showing that dangerous allergic reactions are not caused by inhaled airborne nut particles. Instead a reaction occurs when a child touches a surface that has been exposed to a nut and then ingests the particles.

"Also remember a peanut allergy is not limited to peanuts. Some people with a peanut allergy are allergic to numerous types of nuts and seeds, and nut allergies are often seen in kids with other food allergies, like eggs, or in kids with asthma and eczema," said Cahill.

Here are a few more tips:

General travel tips:

1. Pack snacks. Whether in a car or airport you never know what will be available. Having your own snacks will help eliminate the guessing game concerning which foods are safe for your child to eat.
2. Know your restaurants. Make sure you know how food at restaurants is prepared. For instance, though many fast food chains cook their food in vegetable oil there are a few who use peanut oil. In addition, all pans, dishes and utensils that

were used in preparing food with nuts must be thoroughly cleaned.

3. Have an EpiPen close at hand. In case of an emergency be sure you have an EpiPen and antihistamine medications with you at all times.

Special tips for air travel:

Peanuts are the snack of choice for many airlines. As a result the seats often contain traces of nuts.

1. Bring sanitizing wipes. Before your child sits in his or her seat on the plane wipe down all solid surfaces including arm rests and tray tables with sanitizing wipes to limit contact with nut residue.
2. Put your child in a shirt and pants that cover arms and legs. This will limit the amount of nut residue that will touch a child's skin.
3. You may need a note from your doctor. With increased security at airports this holiday season be sure to bring a note from your doctor explaining the importance of having an EpiPen on hand.

Nut-allergy dangers don't end when you arrive at your destination. It also is important to make sure you are prepared for where you are staying, especially if it's with family.

"Holidays already are stressful for the person hosting so, be thoughtful and proactive in making sure the home is safe for your child," said Cahill.

He suggests:

1. Make contact early. When you know you will be staying at a person's home explain to them early on the severity of a nut allergy and how they can help you keep your child safe.
2. Be specific. Give your host a list of specific items that could endanger your child and ask if the items can be removed. If not, ask him or her to put the items out of reach or locked away.
3. Do your own nut-proofing. If you have a small child ask your host if you can take a look around to ensure your child won't have access to nuts.
4. Offer to help. As a way of helping your host and to make it less stressful offer to bring nut-free snacks, make nut-free dishes for the dinner or purchase the groceries to create dishes that are safe for your child. Also make sure your child knows which dishes are the safe ones or plate your child's dinner.

"It's also important to remind relatives that if they have eaten a product with nuts they should wash their hands and brush their teeth before hugging or kissing a child with a nut allergy," said Cahill.

Source: Loyola University

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