

Late Grade School (8–11 years)

The Food Allergy Stages handouts were designed to help families manage food allergies at different developmental stages.

- Use the *Food Allergy Basics for All Ages* handout to learn about important information all parents should know when they have a child with food allergies.
- Always speak with your child’s allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child’s food allergy management plan.



Older children can be more involved in managing their own food allergies with adult support. Gradually including children in food allergy management helps them build the skills and confidence they will need to manage food allergies independently in the future.

Teaching Children about Food Allergy

- Your child will pick up on your cues about coping with their food allergy. When your words and behaviors show you are confident, this will help them feel more confident too.
- Give the message that food allergies are manageable. “If you eat a food you are allergic to, this could cause an allergic reaction. But the steps we take to avoid allergens and treat reactions work very well to keep you safe.”
- You can use examples of other steps you take to reduce risk in daily life. “Just like we stay on safe paths and always wear a helmet when we ride a bike, we read ingredient labels and always keep your epinephrine auto-injector close by.”
- Avoid scary language such as “life threatening food allergies” that can cause anxiety.
- Make sure your child knows the names of their food allergens and what they look like.
- Let your child know they can come to you with questions about allergies.



Allergen Exposure

- Reinforce rules such as hand washing before eating and no food sharing.
- Teach your child that just being near or smelling an allergen does not cause a reaction. If allergen gets on their skin, they should wash it off. Skin keeps allergens out of the body!

Label Reading

- Older children can take on more responsibility for label reading with adults there to double-check. Practice label reading with foods in your pantry and at the grocery store.
- Teach your child about rules you have developed with their allergist for avoiding foods with precautionary labeling (e.g., “may contain”). It is important to be clear and consistent.
- Reinforce that if there is no label, your child should not eat the food. “When in doubt, don’t eat the food.”



Recognizing and Treating an Allergic Reaction

- Use your child’s Anaphylaxis Action Plan to teach them about possible symptoms of a reaction, such as hives, swelling, vomiting, diarrhea, cough, and throat tightening. Review the plan at least once each year.
- Teach your child to tell an adult if they think they have eaten a food that contains their allergens or if they think they may be having an allergic reaction.
- Explain why you keep the epinephrine auto-injector close by at all times. “Epinephrine is a safe medicine. If you have a reaction, it will help you feel better quickly.”
- Help your child practice with an auto-injector training device regularly to build comfort.
- If your child is nervous about the auto-injector, let them know that the needle is short and skinny (about the length of a dime and shorter than needles for routine shots).

Managing Food Allergies at Home

- Involve your child in food preparation to learn steps to prepare safe meals.
- Create a space for safe, ready-to-serve snacks. Read labels with your child and consider adding “safe” stickers to these foods.
- Make sure your child knows where epinephrine auto-injectors are stored in the house.
- Help your child build a routine of bringing their auto-injector with them whenever they leave the house. “Use the bathroom, grab your coat, and make sure we have your epinephrine auto-injector.”
- Consider using checklists to help increase your child’s independence in managing food allergies (e.g., dance bag packing list: ballet shoes, water bottle, safe snack, epinephrine auto-injector).





Eating Out at Restaurants

- Encourage your child to explain their allergy at restaurants. You can add details and ask more questions as needed.
- Practice restaurant skills ahead of time using role plays and by looking at menus online.
- Teach your child examples of cross-contact and hidden ingredients for their allergens.

Managing Food Allergies at School

- Involve your child in deciding where they will sit during lunch if this is an option at their school. Some children feel safest at an allergen-friendly table while others prefer a safe spot at their classroom table.
- Talk with your child about routines they will follow at school (e.g., washing hands before and after eating, no sharing food, telling an adult if they need help or think they may be having a reaction).
- Check in with your child about any teasing or bullying about food allergies. If there are concerns, talk to the school/adults in charge. Bullying about should never be ignored.

Navigating Social Activities

- Keep a supply of safe treats to have available for birthday parties and celebrations.
- Partner with your child to plan ahead for social events involving food. Some children prefer to eat ahead of time, while others prefer to identify safe food options or bring safe food from home.
- Make sure your child knows the adult in charge and where their epinephrine auto-injector will be kept.
- Help your child practice language for handling common situations, such as ways to say no if offered food or explain why they brought their own food to the party.



Supporting Self-Esteem

- Your child may sometimes feel frustrated, sad, or self-conscious because of food allergies. Let your child know it's okay to have these feelings.
- Encourage your child to come to you if they are feeling upset. Listen first. Even if you can't "fix" the situation, it is important for children to know that you understand.
- Praise your child for making good choices. "I know it was hard when you couldn't eat the pizza at the soccer team party. I am proud about how you explained your allergies."
- Help your child teach friends about food allergies. When friends understand allergies they can be more supportive and choose activities that include your child.

Managing Anxiety and Feeling Confident

- Your child may start to think more about risks related to food allergy at this age. Common misunderstandings are that just being near a food is dangerous, or that smelling or touching the food could cause anaphylaxis.
- Ask your child's allergist to talk with your child about how to stay safe without limiting daily activities.
- Team up with your child to plan ahead for situations they are worried about.
- Involve your child in coming up with coping thoughts for challenging situations based on what they know about food allergies. "It's not dangerous just to smell peanut butter." Or, "I'm not going to be eating my friend's food!"
- If your child has an allergic reaction, they may feel more worried afterwards. Help your child return to their usual allergy management routines. Talk with them about the parts of the emergency plan that worked well. "You did the right thing when you told me your stomach hurt," or "Your auto-injector stopped the reaction quickly." This can also be an opportunity to talk about anything you will do differently to stay safe in the future.
- Talk with your child's allergist or primary care provider if they are experiencing anxiety about food allergies. This could include worried thoughts, eating fewer foods (even if the food is safe), needing reassurance that food is safe, or avoiding social situations involving food. Mental health professionals can help families cope with anxiety related to food allergies.



Preparing Children for Medical Visits

- Talk to your child about the appointment several days ahead of time. Discuss what will happen and let your child ask questions.
- Ask your child to think about questions for their allergist and make a list.
- If your child is worried about the appointment, plan ahead of time how you will use coping strategies. For skin testing, bring activities to keep busy (e.g., games on a tablet, drawing, or reading). For procedures like blood testing, consider coping strategies such as distraction (e.g., watching a video, counting backwards) or a relaxation technique such as deep breathing.
- Involve your child in the appointment, such as talking with their allergist about how their Anaphylaxis Action Plan works and practicing with an epinephrine auto-injector training device.
- After the appointment, provide verbal praise for your child's participation. Encourage them to share their feelings and review what they learned for the next appointment.

See the Food Allergy Stages *Early Teen* handout for questions about managing food allergies as your child gets older.