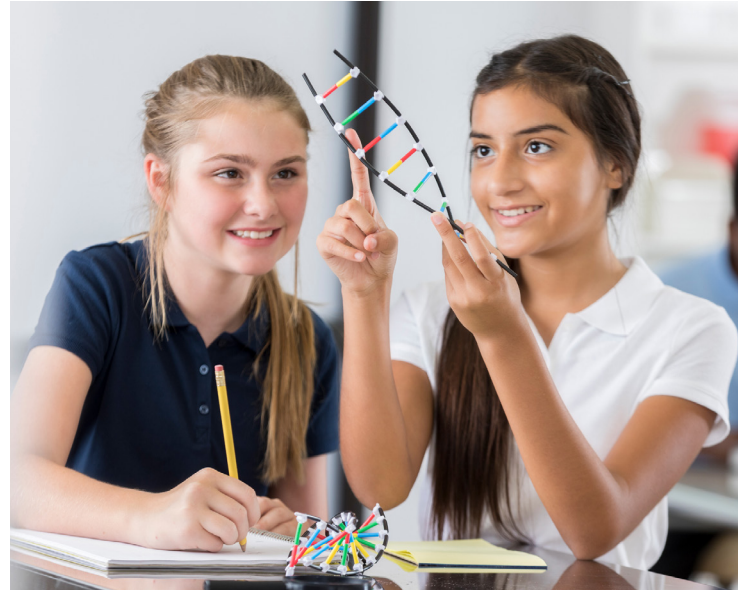


Early Teen (11–14 years)

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.



Early teens can play a bigger role in managing their food allergies with continued adult support. When you gradually give your child more responsibility, this helps them build the skills and confidence to manage food allergies independently in the future.

Teaching Pre-Teens and Teens 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.
- Empower your child with the message that food allergies are manageable. “Allergic reactions can be serious, but the steps we take to manage allergies work well to keep you safe and let you do the things you enjoy.”
- As your child starts to share more of the responsibility for managing their food allergies, check in with them regularly about how things are going. Talk about who will be responsible for different tasks (e.g., reading ingredient labels, communicating about food allergies, carrying the epinephrine auto-injector). At this age, a team approach works best.
- Let your child know they can always come to you with questions or tell you if they think they made a “mistake.” When you keep the lines of communication open, this is an opportunity to build problem-solving skills.

Allergen Exposure

- Make sure your child understands the different ways to come into contact with an allergen. Eating the food causes the greatest risk for anaphylaxis.
- Teach your child that just being near or smelling an allergen does not cause a reaction (e.g., smelling a peanut butter sandwich cannot cause an allergic reaction). In rare cases, allergic reactions can occur from breathing in the allergen. This only happens in very specific situations, usually during cooking (e.g., steaming fish). These reactions are usually mild.
- If allergen gets on their skin, this could cause hives or other skin symptoms. They should wash off the allergen with soap and water.
- Reinforce routines such as hand-washing before eating and not sharing food.

Food Allergy Stages: Early Teen (11-14 years)

Label Reading

- Once your child starts spending time on their own, it is important that they know how to read ingredient labels.
- Practice label reading with your child using foods in your pantry and at the grocery store.
- Teach your child the 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.
- Teach your child to read ingredient labels every time, because ingredients can change.
- Reinforce that if you/your child cannot read a label, your child should not eat the food.



Recognizing and Treating an Allergic Reaction

- Use your child’s Anaphylaxis Action Plan to teach about possible symptoms of a reaction, including symptoms that should be treated with epinephrine. Review the plan each year.
- Teach your child how to use their epinephrine auto-injector. Practice using a training device for the brand of epinephrine auto-injector they carry. If you have expired auto-injectors you no longer need, consider having your child practice on an orange or grapefruit.
- Talk about why your child should have their auto-injector with them at all times. Epinephrine is a safe medicine that works well to stop allergic reactions. It works best when it is given soon after the reaction.
- Help your child build the habit of bringing their epinephrine auto-injector with them whenever they leave the house (e.g., use the bathroom, grab your coat, and take your epinephrine auto-injector). Plan for how they will carry their medications (e.g., in a backpack, purse).
- Discuss your child’s emergency plan. They should tell an adult if they think they are having an allergic reaction.
- Make sure your child knows how to call 911 for transportation to the emergency room for anaphylaxis.
- 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

- Teach your child about steps to avoid cross-contact.
- Involve your child in meal planning, grocery shopping, and cooking to learn steps to prepare safe meals.
- Keep safe ready-to-serve foods available so your child can prepare snacks independently.
- Make sure you and your child have a plan for where epinephrine auto-injectors will be stored in the house.

Eating Out at Restaurants

- It is important to involve your child in steps you take to eat out safely.
- Visit restaurant web sites together to practice thinking about safe options.
- Use role plays to practice communicating about allergies and asking about food preparation at restaurants. Make sure to practice talking about common examples of cross-contact and hidden ingredients for your child’s allergens.
- Let your child take the lead role in communicating with restaurant staff. You can provide support as needed.
- Make sure your child always has their epinephrine auto-injector with them at the restaurant. Remind them that they should not eat without it.
- If your child will be eating out with friends, consider calling or visiting the restaurant ahead of time with your child so they will feel prepared.
- Help your child practice language to use when eating out with friends. “I always tell the restaurant about my food allergies. It’s just my routine.”
- Consider having your child carry their own “chef card” that lists their allergens.

Food Allergy Stages: Early Teen (11-14 years)

Managing Food Allergies at School

- Depending on school policies, your child may be able to start carrying their epinephrine auto-injector with them. Talk to your child about their comfort with self-carrying. Always have back-up medication stored in the nurse's office.
- Involve your child in choosing where they will sit in the lunchroom. Some children feel safest at an allergen-free table, while others prefer to choose a safe spot with friends.
- Involve your child in planning how to handle school events where food will be served.
- Talk to your child about their role in managing food allergies at school (e.g., communicating about allergies, reading labels, not sharing food, hand washing, knowing symptoms of an allergic reaction and letting staff know if they feel sick).
- Check in with your child about any teasing, bullying, or social exclusion related to food allergies.



Navigating Social Activities

- Partner with your child to plan ahead for social events involving food. When they choose a plan that works for them, they will feel more confident and take fewer risks.
- If possible, check ahead of time what foods will be served at the event. Make sure your child is comfortable communicating about their allergies and reading labels.
- Some children may prefer to eat ahead of time or bring safe food from home.
- Your child should always bring their epinephrine auto-injector, even if they will not be eating. Help your child plan how to carry medication.
- Make sure friends know where your child keeps their auto-injector and what to do in an emergency.
- Start to talk about new situations that may come up as your child gets older, such as dating. Your child should know that mouth kissing can transfer allergens. Discuss ways to reduce this risk. For example, no mouth kissing unless the partner knows about the food allergy and has avoided your child's allergens for at least several hours (eating an allergen-free meal can help too). At restaurants, suggest that the partner's meal also be allergen-free.
- Begin to discuss the risks of drugs and alcohol. These can affect decision-making, such as not being as careful about avoiding allergens and making it harder to recognize and treat allergic reactions. Alcohol can contain allergens. It can also make food allergen proteins travel from your stomach to your bloodstream faster and undigested, so you might have a more severe reaction to a much smaller amount of the food.





Supporting Self-Esteem

- Fitting in with peers is important at this age. Some children may feel self-conscious about their food allergies or embarrassed to speak up about allergies in social situations.
- Encourage your child to tell their friends about their allergies. When friends understand allergies, they are more likely to choose activities that include your teen and help them stay safe.
- Role-play strategies for handling peer pressure to try a food, or speaking up if an activity is not safe. This will help your child feel prepared to speak up for themselves if needed.
- Let your child know it's okay to feel frustrated, sad, or angry at times because of food allergies. Encourage your child to come to you if they are feeling upset. Listen first without interrupting. Your child should know you understand their perspective.
- Let your child know that you are proud of safe choices they make.

Managing Anxiety and Feeling Confident

- As children manage allergies more independently, they may feel more worried about activities where food is present. Some children worry more about risks related to food allergy. Common misunderstandings are that just being near a food is dangerous, or that touching the food will cause a severe reaction.
- 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, based on what they know about food allergies. "It's not dangerous just to smell peanut butter."
- If your child has an allergic reaction, they may feel more worried afterwards. Help them return to allergy management routines. Talk about the parts of the emergency plan that worked well. "You did the right thing when you told your teacher 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 feeling anxious about food allergies. This could include worried thoughts, eating fewer foods (even if the food is safe), avoiding social activities when food is present, or needing more reassurance that food is safe. Mental health professionals can help children cope with anxiety related to food allergies.

Preparing Children for Medical Visits

- Talk to your child a few days ahead of time about the reason for their allergy visit and procedures they may have. Give them a chance to share their feelings and ask questions.
- Ask your child to think about and write down questions to ask their allergist. This will help them play an active role in the visit.
- Consider giving your child one-on-one time with their allergist to talk about topics such as kissing or drugs and alcohol.
- If your child is worried about the appointment, plan coping strategies ahead of time. For skin testing, bring activities to keep busy (e.g., games on a phone or 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 breathing.
- After the appointment, talk with your child about what they learned.

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