

Preparing for Your Child's First Food Challenge

What to Know, What to Bring, and What to Expect

A food challenge is a diagnostic test — and often the first step toward freedom.

What Is an Oral Food Challenge?

An oral food challenge (OFC) is a medical procedure where your child eats small, gradually increasing amounts of a food allergen under close medical supervision. It's the gold standard for:

- **Confirming a food allergy** — Testing can sometimes give unclear results
- **Ruling out an allergy** — Many children are avoiding foods they're not truly allergic to
- **Determining if an allergy has been outgrown** — Some allergies resolve naturally over time
- **Establishing a baseline** — Before starting treatment like OIT

Before the Food Challenge

1-2 Weeks Before:

- Discuss any concerns or questions with our team
- Inform us of any illnesses, infections, or changes in health
- Review the medications your child is currently taking
- Confirm your appointment time and expected duration (typically 3-5 hours)

Medications to Avoid:

Certain medications can affect the accuracy of the food challenge. Please discuss with our team, but generally you should stop:

- **Antihistamines** (Benadryl, Zyrtec, Claritin, Allegra): Stop 5-7 days before
- **Acid reflux medications** (Pepcid, Zantac): Stop 3 days before
- **Asthma medications:** Continue as prescribed unless instructed otherwise

■■ Do NOT stop any medication without talking to our team first.

The Day Before:

- Ensure your child gets a good night's sleep
- Avoid introducing any new foods
- Pack a bag with activities, snacks, and comfort items

- Confirm your child is healthy (no fever, cold, or stomach issues)

What to Bring to the Food Challenge

Checklist — Pack the Night Before:

- Insurance card and photo ID
- List of current medications
- Your child's epinephrine auto-injector(s)
- Safe snacks your child can eat (in case the challenge is stopped)
- Drinks (water, juice)
- Entertainment: tablet, books, games, toys, headphones
- Chargers for electronic devices
- Comfort items (blanket, stuffed animal)
- Change of clothes (for younger children)
- Completed paperwork (if provided in advance)

The Morning Of:

- Feed your child a light breakfast (not the food being tested)
- Arrive on time — late arrivals may need to reschedule
- Dress your child in comfortable, loose clothing
- Stay calm and positive — children pick up on parental anxiety

What Happens During the Food Challenge

The food challenge follows a careful, step-by-step process:

Step 1: Check-In

We'll review your child's health, confirm medications stopped, and take vital signs.

Step 2: First Dose

Your child eats a tiny amount of the food (often just a fraction of a gram).

Step 3: Observation

We wait 15-30 minutes and monitor for any reaction.

Step 4: Increasing Doses

If no reaction, slightly larger doses are given at regular intervals.

Step 5: Final Observation

After the last dose, we observe for 1-2 hours before discharge.

Possible Outcomes

Passed:

Great news! Your child tolerated the food without a significant reaction. We'll discuss next steps, which may include gradually introducing the food at home.

Failed (Reaction Occurred):

A reaction confirms the allergy. Our team will treat any symptoms immediately and safely. We'll then discuss treatment options, including OIT, to help your child build tolerance.

Inconclusive:

Sometimes results are unclear. We may recommend retesting at a later date or additional diagnostics.

After the Food Challenge

- Monitor your child for delayed reactions for 24-48 hours
- Follow specific discharge instructions provided by our team
- Call us immediately if symptoms develop after leaving
- Schedule a follow-up appointment to discuss results and next steps

Tips for Parents

- **Stay positive:** Your attitude affects your child's experience
- **Bring distractions:** The wait times can be long for kids
- **Ask questions:** Our team is here to help you understand every step
- **Trust the process:** We've done thousands of food challenges safely
- **Celebrate afterward:** Regardless of outcome, your child was brave!

Questions before your appointment? Call us at 262-657-9390