

the new "normal"

Living with a Child with Food Allergies

By Angie Mizzell

When my son, Blake, was nine months old, I learned he was severely allergic to milk, eggs and peanuts. A skin test followed by a blood test confirmed what I'd suspected for months. It started when I introduced him to formula and he broke out in hives. And then, Blake developed a rash around his mouth that wouldn't heal.

The diagnosis of potentially life-threatening allergies was overwhelming at first. Our kitchen was stocked with foods he couldn't eat. The rash on his face was caused by the allergens on our hands. I had a three-year-old who dropped crumbs on the floor and a crawling baby who put everything in his mouth. While I scoured allergy websites and devised an action plan, my husband installed baby gates to keep Blake out of the kitchen. We taught our older son to wash his hands and face after every meal.

Today, Blake is two, and "big brother" likes to protect him, reminding friends that hand washing keeps him safe. I never leave the house without an adequate supply of Blake-friendly snacks. I found a childcare provider with experience in dealing with food allergies. And soon, Blake will have a better understanding of why he can't eat, or even touch, certain foods. According to John Ramey, MD, an allergist in Charleston, SC, "It's always important for the child to understand what they are allergic to and how to manage an allergic reaction. It's okay for a child to tell an adult or a friend that they cannot eat certain foods."

Living with food allergies has become our "normal." We have drastically



Did you know...

About 3 million children in the U.S. have food allergies.

Peanut and tree nut allergies in kids have tripled in the past ten years

While children can outgrow food allergies, some allergies can persist into adulthood.

*source: The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network

reduced Blake's allergic reactions now that we know what causes them. Except for the time at the beach, when Blake ate a fistful of sand and broke out in hives. That's how I found out he's also allergic to shellfish. But I was surprised to learn he's not allergic to Oreos (doesn't contain milk). While not the healthiest of snacks, they satisfy him at birthday parties when other kids are eating cake. With food allergies, knowledge is power.

EATING OUT?

If necessary, bring your own food. Explain your child has allergies. • When in doubt, ask. Are the chicken fingers battered in egg? Will the cook use clean utensils? • Be polite and tip well.

HOW TO DEAL WITH FOOD ALLERGIES AT HOME:

Wash kitchen surfaces and utensils with soap and water.

Buy an extra cutting board for allergy-free foods.

Make sure everyone in the family can recognize an allergic reaction, and knows where to locate the EpiPen and how to use it.

Teach everyone how to read food labels.

LOOKING FOR ALLERGY-FREE RECIPES? Visit KidswithFoodAllergies.org