

Letting Go

As your teen grows into adulthood and strives for independence—you must encourage this growth and provide guidance without making all the decisions or overly restricting freedom.

While taking care of food allergy yourself may be easier, it will not help your child in the long run. Although it may be difficult to “let go” and have your teen take control, remember that learning to identify and overcome challenges will teach your teen how to live successfully with food allergies.

Talk to your child’s doctor or have your teen do so if you have questions or concerns about food allergy management.

Resources Available from the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network

Stories from Parents’ Hearts: Essays by Parents of Children with Food Allergies

A collection of stories from parents who are raising children with food allergies, providing insight and collective wisdom of those who have “been there.”

Learning to Live with Food Allergies: Tips for Parents and Teens

A two-booklet set, one for parents, the other for teens, providing strategies for establishing rules, transferring control of food allergy, and learning how to communicate effectively.

Parent and Teen Talks

These special lunch sessions take place at FAAN’s annual food allergy conferences, held each spring. Parents and teens, aged 11 to 18, may register for the session. Parents of teens will be able to talk to other parents and share challenges, successes, and strategies. Teens will be able to meet peers and discuss food allergy issues and concerns. Contact FAAN for more information about registration.

Stories from the Heart: A Collection of Essays from Teens with Food Allergies, Vol. I & II

This compilation of stories helps teens learn from their peers. They’ll receive practical tips and advice, and circumstances surrounding reactions from teens around the world living with food allergies.

Food Allergy News for Teens

This electronic newsletter is sent free every other month via e-mail; it offers stories, advice, and tips for managing food allergies. To sign up, send an e-mail to teens-request@foodallergy.org with the word SUBSCRIBE in the subject line.

Contact FAAN

For more information about food allergies, contact:

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References

Bock SA, Munoz-Furlong A, Sampson HA. Fatalities due to anaphylactic reactions to foods. *J Allergy Clin Immunol.* 2001; 107(1):191–193.

Noone SA, et al. Parent and Adolescent Perceptions on Food Allergy. *J Allergy Clin Immunol.* 2003 111(2):256.

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Talking to Your **TEEN** about **FOOD ALLERGY**



Talking to Your Teen about Food Allergy

Just one bite of an allergy-causing food can be enough to cause a life-threatening reaction. One study of fatal allergic reactions showed that teens with peanut allergy and asthma are at higher risk than others for a severe reaction. Lack of preparation and not having a plan for handling a reaction were key causes in these deaths.

Adolescence marks the beginning of a teen's journey into adulthood—one that is full of new experiences and, at times, confusing changes and emotions. Teens may be more likely to participate in risk-taking behavior—therefore, it is no wonder that parents of teens with food allergies worry about their children's safety.

As your teen becomes more independent it is critical that you keep the lines of communication open so that you can guide your teen in making the right choices as new situations come up.

It's All about Communication

Encourage communication by showing your teen that you can be trusted in conversation. This means not reminding your teen about fears or mistakes, and not embarrassing, ridiculing, dismissing, or yelling, especially in public or in front of others.

Share your concerns and fears, and encourage your teen to do the same. Provide positive feedback and encouragement when your teen does something right. Remember what it was like when you were a teen. Do your best to recognize what is important to your teen and respect those issues. Think about how you listen to peers and co-workers and apply those skills to conversations with your teen. Ask questions and demonstrate that you understand.

Spend more time with your teen in activities that you both like, such as sports, crafts, shopping, or

going to the movies. Use these moments to grow closer to your teen, but don't try to discuss sensitive issues such as the latest food allergy reaction or mistake. Reserve serious discussions for when you have privacy and no distractions. Ask your teen to set aside time to talk.

What to Discuss

If you want your teen to be open and honest with you, you must model that behavior. Are you concerned about your teen's behavior? Say so! Explain what scares you and why so that your teen better understands your feelings. Often teens are so focused on their own lives that they forget how they affect family members.

Food allergy is serious. Food allergic reactions can be fatal. If you are worried about your teen not knowing how to recognize the symptoms of a reaction, talk about it. You may find that your teen is more prepared than you thought.

Ask your teen how a reaction will be handled away from home and stress the importance of carrying medication.

Many parents report that their teens balk at carrying medicine because they feel that there is no easy way to do so.

Brainstorm how you can make carrying medications easier. Become part of the solution, not part of the problem.

One parent discovered that her daughter wouldn't carry her EpiPen® because she was afraid that the needle would accidentally become exposed and jab her. Purchasing a hard plastic, puncture-proof case in which to carry the medicine solved the problem. There are many styles of epinephrine carriers on the market now; contact

the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) for a list of resources.

Risk taking is dangerous.

Risk taking, such as trying a new food without knowing the ingredients or not carrying medicine, may occur because of temptation, peer pressure, or simply acting on impulse. If your teen is displaying risk-taking behavior, talk about it.

Describe potential outcomes for the behavior, and work together to find an appropriate solution.

Food allergy can be managed. By repeating positive messages, you help your teen become more self-confident and self-assured—attributes that will come in handy when it's time for your teen to stand up to peer pressure and think independently.

Emphasizing your confidence in your teen and repeating, "You can do it!" empowers your teen to better manage the food allergy and handle challenges that arise.

Outline Responsibilities

Outline specific responsibilities for your teen as well as the consequences for not following them. One family has a rule that their teen cannot have the keys to the car unless he shows that he has his medication with him. Another family turns around and goes home to get the EpiPen® if their son forgets to take it with him, even if it makes them late for an event.

Other examples of responsibilities might include your teen reading labels, asking questions about ingredients in restaurant settings or when eating at someone else's home, or educating close friends about the allergy and how they might help in the event of an allergic reaction.

A FAAN survey found that as teens age, they are more likely to take risks with their food allergy. Taking a risk in the past without negative consequences or wanting to eat a certain food were the two most cited rationales for taking a risk.

Did You Know?

Adolescents participating in a survey were asked to identify the most difficult part of living with food allergies—most claimed social isolation.

When their parents were asked the same question, most reported fear of their child dying from a food allergy reaction.

In a FAAN survey of teens and young adults, ages 13 to 21, only two-thirds characterized themselves as being "very prepared" to deal with an allergic reaction.