

WAGING WAR ON ALLERGIES

With the rapid rise in food allergies in children, a hot topic on the minds of health care professionals is how to prevent allergies. Potential allergens are foods that may possibly cause an allergy and include foods such as eggs, fish, shellfish, nuts, and eggs. Here are five guidelines that may help to nip allergies in the bud.

1. Give birth naturally.

The high rates of C-sections have been linked to the rise in allergy rates in children. This is especially true in children who are at risk for developing allergies, that is, those with two parents allergic to a particular allergen.

During natural birth babies are exposed to the mother's bacteria as they pass through the birth canal. This colonizes the baby's gut with good beneficial bacteria which is desirable as bacteria are known to play a key role in the development of the immune system. In C-section births the very sterile process of not passing through the bacteria-filled birth canal and the sterilization of equipment used in the procedure causes less exposure of the baby to the mom's healthy bacteria. This is thought to be a potential reason for the increased rates of allergies.

2. Breast is best.

The European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN) has concluded that the most effective dietary measure to prevent allergic disease is exclusive breastfeeding for 4 to 6 months.

3. Introduce solids at the right time.

In an attempt to reduce allergy rates, health care providers in the past focused on the delayed introduction of potentially allergic foods. However it is in fact the delayed introduction of solids that has led to the high allergy rates. The ESPGHAN committee suggests introducing solids between the ages of 17 and 26 weeks.

4. Do not avoid potential allergens.

In an attempt to prevent allergies mothers were advised to avoid all foods that could potentially cause an allergy. New research shows that this too has likely led to increased allergy rates. Also of concern are the nutritional consequences of delaying or avoiding certain foods. For example, excluding fish from a child's diet may put them at risk for a low omega-3 intake, a nutrient important in healthy development and functioning of the brain and immune system.

There is no evidence that avoiding or delaying the introduction of potentially allergic foods reduces the risk for allergy. This is true for both infants considered to be at risk of allergy development (those with allergic parents) and in those who are not at risk. Instead, mothers should continue to eat potential allergens throughout their pregnancies and during breast feeding to expose the infant to small amounts of the allergens.

5. Introduce one allergen at a time

As established above, it is recommended that weaning foods are not introduced before 17 weeks. In addition to this, foods should be added one at a time in order to detect if the infant is allergic to a particular food.

References

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