Psychosocial Aspects of Food Allergy among Adolescents

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Today’s Presenter

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Objectives

- Who are pediatric psychologists?
- Why is adolescence such a challenging developmental stage?
- What are common psychosocial concerns among adolescents with food allergy?
- How do we address some of these concerns?
- Case examples
Who are pediatric psychologists?

- Work with children and families in order to:
  - Address the psychological aspects of illness and injury
  - Promote healthy behavior in children and families
- Use a developmental framework
- Work with multidisciplinary teams
- Clinical work
- Research
- Advocate for public policy
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<th>Emotional Reactions to Food Allergy</th>
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<td>Frustration</td>
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<td>Stress</td>
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<td>Worry</td>
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These are normal reactions!
Food Allergy Adjustment

- The first allergic reaction
- Diagnosis
- Initial food allergy management
- Stable disease management periods
- Cycles of uncertainty
  - Allergic reactions
  - New allergies/information
  - Oral food challenges
  - Food reintroduction
  - Developmental changes
  - Transitions
Brain changes

- Cerebral cortex thickens
- Neuronal pathways become more efficient
- Age 13–15 – increases in abstract thinking, metacognition
- Age 15–17 – growth in frontal lobe leads to increased logic and planning
Cognitive changes

- Piaget – Formal Operations Stage of Development
  - Emerges between age 12 – 16
  - Systematic Problem Solving

- David Elkind- adolescent egocentrism
  - Personal Fable
    ▪ Belief that events are controlled by a mentally constructed autobiography
  - Imaginary Audience
    ▪ Internalized set of standards usually derived from peer group
    ▪ Alter behavior based on how teens think friends will perceive it
Adolescence- Why Is It So Hard?

- **Friendships become increasingly intimate**
  - Share inner feelings, secrets; More knowledgeable about others’ feeling
  - Adolescent friendships are more stable than friendships in younger children – better negotiation of conflicts

- **Changes in peer group structure**
  - Cliques – 4-6 teens who are strongly attached to one another
  -Crowds – larger groups that include males and females
    - Reputation-based groups – teen identifies with group either by choice or by peer designation
    - Provide an *identity prototype* – labeling others and oneself as belonging to a group helps to create or reinforce the adolescent’s own identity
### Adolescence- Why Is It So Hard?

- **Sensation Seeking**
  - Desire to experience increased levels of arousal
  - Risky behavior may gain peer acceptance and gain autonomy from parents
  - Teens spend more time with technology (TV, music, video games, computer) than they do in school
Responsibility for food allergy management begins to shift from parent to teen
- Teens and parents have different ideas about how to manage food allergies

Peer social situations predominate—many involve food
- May be hesitant to tell others about food allergies
- May forget/refuse to read food labels, ask about ingredients
- May not want to carry epinephrine auto-injectors

Risk taking behavior
- Teens who previously were very vigilant about their food allergies may confuse parents by suddenly seeming to not care
Common Psychosocial Concerns

• How do I help my child cope with food allergy-related anxiety?
• How do I help my child navigate peer situations and bullying?
• How do I successfully transition food allergy management to my child?
• How do I prepare my child for living on her own?
• How do I manage my own anxiety?
Managing Teen Anxiety

- Basic cognitive-behavioral strategies
  - Psychoeducation
  - Self-monitoring
  - Relaxation strategies
  - Thought challenging
  - Problem solving
Talking With Peers

- Talk openly with teens about their concerns about telling peers about food allergy
- Address their concerns
- Help teens problem solve and role play if needed
- Encourage teens to talk with peers in a natural way
- Identify key peers who should know about food allergy
Coping With Bullying

- Ask open-ended questions
- Talk to other adults about the situation
- Investigate the school bullying policy
- Encourage avoidance of the bully and use of a buddy system
- Teach frustration management strategies
- Sign up your child for other activities
Transitioning Food Allergy Management

- Transition is a series of steps
  - Make a list of food allergy responsibilities and identify simple ones you think your child can do
  - Find a good time/place to discuss transition with your child
  - Allow your child to be primarily responsible for some simple food allergy management tasks, but provide oversight
  - As you and your child are more confident in his ability to do these tasks, check in only periodically
  - Give your child private time during an allergy appointment to ask about allergy concerns and begin to take a larger role in the medical management
Managing Parent Stress

- Use deep breathing to calm yourself during stressful situations
- Use problem solving techniques to manage situations that you can control
- Acknowledge that sometimes you can’t change the situation, but you CAN change how you react to it
- Expand your network of support
- Take time for yourself!
Case Example 1

- Adam is an 11-year-old boy who has milk, egg, and shellfish allergies, as well as oral allergy syndrome. He has always been a “picky eater.”
  - Adam experiences OAS symptoms that make him worry he is having an allergic reaction.
  - He has gradually begun to restrict his food range and has lost 5 pounds in the past 2 months.
  - Adam is nervous about new foods.
  - Adam’s parents frequently find his lunchbox full when he gets home from school.
Case Example 2

- Clara is a 12-year-old girl diagnosed with peanut, tree nut, and sesame allergy. She had an allergic reaction recently for the first time in 6 years.
  - Clara feels somewhat nervous about food allergy management, but also wants to have more independence for food allergy management.
  - Clara isn’t sure if she wants all of her friends to know about her food allergies, but also wants to go to sleepovers at friends’ homes.
Conclusions and Psychology Resources

- It is normal to experience adjustment concerns related to food allergy
- BUT monitor your teen for these symptoms and seek help from a professional if needed
- Psychology Referral information
  - Ask your child’s pediatrician or allergist who they recommend
  - Use your insurance company’s website to locate psychologists in your network
  - Look for psychologists with experience with children and anxiety
Let’s discuss!
Our Next Webinar

Students with Food Allergies and Disability Laws: High School to College

Presented by:

Jim Long, JD
Educational Rights Consulting

Wednesday, July 27, 2016
1:00 – 2:30 PM ET

General registration opens: Thursday, July 14

www.foodallergy.org/tools-and-resources/webinars