If I Only Knew Then What I Know Now
Allergy Tips for Teens

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Today’s Presenter

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IF I ONLY KNEW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW

ALLERGY TIPS FOR TEENS

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  • www.allergytranslation.com
• Allergies: peanut, tree nut, egg, fish, shellfish, mustard, penicillin
  • Plus asthma and eczema
AGENDA

• Teens and Risk-Taking
• My Teenage Years
  • Lessons Learned
• Tips for Teens
• Tips for Parents
• Q & A
TEENS AND RISK-TAKING

What Research Tells Us
WHY DON’T TEENS “KNOW BETTER”? 

The teenage brain 
- A work in progress
- Does not fully mature until mid-twenties

Brain sections mature at different times

Frontal cortex – “The area of sober second thought”
- Essential in:
  - Judgment
  - Decision making
  - Impulse control

Parental involvement can have a protective effect

Source: Dr. Jay Giedd, National Institute of Mental Health
TEENS AND RISK-TAKING

174 subjects with food allergy (13 to 21 yrs)

- 87% had been prescribed epinephrine
- 61% reported always carrying epinephrine
- Frequencies varied by activities:
  - Travelling (94%)
  - Restaurants (81%)
  - Friends’ homes (67%)
  - School dance (61%)
  - Wearing tight clothes (53%)
  - Sports (43%)

Risk-taking & Coping Strategies of Food Allergic Adolescents and Young Adults, M Sampson et al, JACI 2006
(CONT’D)

• 42% would eat a food labelled “may contain”
• 68% believe education of friends would make living with food allergy easier
  • But only 60% tell their friends about their allergy

Education of teens and peers could reduce risk taking and its consequences
CAUSE OF REACTIONS

18 teenagers surveyed and interviewed
– Age 11-18

Reason for most recent reaction:

• (31%) Did not ask or check the ingredients
• (31%) Did not know I was allergic to the food
• (25%) Unexpected ingredient in usually safe food
• (6%) Cross-contamination of food
FOOD LABELLING RISKS

If a food label says ‘may contain’ your allergen, what do you do?

• (24%) Don’t eat it
• (24%) Try a little bit and then wait to see if you have a reaction
• (18%) Eat it because chance of it actually containing allergen is very low
• (18%) Eat it because I ate it before and did not have a reaction
• (18%) Other

How do teenagers manage their food allergies?
H. Monks, M.H. Gowland, H. Mackenzie, M. Erlewun-Lajeunesse, R. King, J.S. Lucas and G. Roberts
Clinical & Experimental Allergy 2011
TRANSITIONAL RISKS

Elementary School → Middle School → High School

• Less control over school environment

New set of friends

New issues

• Desire to fit in/be normal

• More responsibility to manage allergies

New situations

How are you supposed to know how to handle it all?

Parents: Prepare them in advance and reinforce self-reliance, management through open communication.
WHAT MAKES IT EVEN HARDER...

Anxiety
• Reactions can be scary

Bullying
• Cyber-bullying

Peer pressure

Exclusion

Food… “It’s Complicated”

Feeling like a burden
• Guilt for accommodations

Common Result: Discreet about being allergic & risk-taking
MY TEENAGE YEARS
ALLERGIC AND COOL ;)
THEN...NOT SO COMPLIANT

- Did not commonly disclose my food allergies
- Took risks with food
  - Resulted in many reactions
- Did not have epinephrine with me at all times
- Poor routine thinking I had things under control
  - In reality I didn’t
THEN THE BIGGIE
HOW I MANAGE AS AN ADULT

- Does not slow me down
- I manage allergies while
  - Travelling
  - Playing sports
  - Canoe trips
  - Everyday life
- Staying safe is second nature

It feels good to be in control!
TIPS FOR TEENS

My Top 10 List
TIP 1 – ALWAYS CARRY EPINEPHRINE
ALWAYS CARRY EPINEPHRINE

• Backpack, purse or pocket, just bring it
• Make sure it is secure
• Simple rule:
  • No epinephrine, no food
• If you forget it…
  • Go back and get it
  • Viable solution for being late
• Have a system to remember it
• Don’t be afraid to use it!
TIP 2 – TAKE INGREDIENT LISTS SERIOUSLY
INGREDIENT LISTS

• “May Contain”...may contain!

• Remember that some things may change
  • Product ingredients
    • New manufacturing plant/processes
  • Restaurant recipes
    • Suppliers change
TIP 3 – ALLERGENS CAN BE WHERE YOU LEAST EXPECT THEM
HIDDEN ALLERGENS

Use your head and don’t make assumptions!

- Sauces look similar, but are not created equal
- Sharing drinks
- Passing joints
  - Eating pot brownies
- Cross-contact
  - Buffets
  - Making after-school snacks
TIP 4 - KNOW THE RISKS OF INTIMACY
KNOW THE RISKS OF INTIMACY

Kissing

• Yes there is a risk!
  • Proteins in saliva
  • Reduce the risk by
    • Waiting an extended period of time
    • Brushing teeth
    • Avoiding allergen
• Communicate first…not during!
  • It can really ruin a moment…

More than kissing…
TIP 5 – DON’T KEEP IT A SECRET
DON'T KEEP IT A SECRET

1) Your food allergies
2) An allergic reaction

Don’t

• Be embarrassed if something doesn’t feel right
• Go off alone!

Do

• Put yourself in their shoes
• Tell your friends what to expect before a reaction happens, and how you would like them to respond/help
TIP 6 – WEAR MEDICAL I.D.
WEAR MEDICAL I.D.

- “I used to when I was a kid…but I can communicate my allergies now…”
  - Can you communicate a reaction when you need to?
    - Travelling
    - When alone
- Many cool options available
  - I wear a dog tag and a leather cuff
TIP 7 – PROVE YOU’RE RESPONSIBLE

IF ONLY BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR ALLERGIES WAS THIS EASY
PROVE YOU’RE RESPONSIBLE

Why is this important?

• To get your parents off your back!
  • Gain their trust, earn your freedom!
• If you want other’s to take them seriously…

How can I prove it?

• Be proactive
  • Always carry epinephrine
  • Wear Medical I.D.
  • Offer to help with meal planning
  • Research for upcoming trips
TIP 8 - OWN YOUR ALLERGIES
OWN YOUR ALLERGIES

• Your allergies, your story, your voice
• Makes it easy to speak up for yourself throughout your life
• They are only a small part of you
  • They do not define you
• Friends critical about your allergies?
  • Do you have a voice in that friendship?
• Own your tone
  • Work with them, not against them
• Learn to live in the real world where self-management can get you through any situation
TIP 9 – BE A LEADER, NOT A VICTIM
LEAD THE WAY!

Empower yourself by educating others

- Join TAG
- Talk to a restaurant manager
- Call a manufacturer
- Write a politician
- Make a presentation
- Make a school club
- Create a YouTube video
- Write a song 😊
TIP 10 - STAY POSITIVE! 😊
STAY POSITIVE

• It’s okay to get frustrated
• Keep things in perspective
• Allergies can be a strength, not a weakness
  • Builds character! (resilience, responsibility)
• Remind yourself that you are the expert
• Master the “workarounds”
  • Have your own food handy
  • Stick to the basics
  • Have snappy comebacks ready
• Remember: it’s just food
TIPS FOR PARENTS
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The Teen Years:

• Unexpected situations
• New risks
• Unclear management strategies
• Unsure emergency responses
• Reinforce the “non-negotiables”

Don’t take it all on yourself. Help them own it.

Predict it
Prepare for it
Play it out
TOP 4 TIPS FOR PARENTS

1. Connect
   • Early and often
   • Keep lines of communication open

2. Guide
   • Don’t do everything for them.
   • Transition responsibility
   • Help them make smart risks

3. Support
   • Their requests for accommodation
   • Independence

4. Let Go
   • Acknowledge and encourage
   • Be patient and work together
THE GOAL – SELF MANAGEMENT

Gradual shift of responsibilities

![Graph showing the gradual shift of responsibilities from high school to college and life. The x-axis represents grades from 1 to 12, with separate sections for College and Life. The y-axis represents the percentage of responsibility, ranging from 0% to 100%. The graph shows a linear increase in responsibility as grades advance.](Image)
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FARE
• Teen Advisory Group (TAG)
• Facebook support group
• Annual Teen Summit
• www.foodallergy.org/resources/teens

The Ultimate Guidebook for Teens with Food Allergies (Food Allergy Canada)

Epinephrine
• www.epipen.com
• www.auvi-q.com
  • Please note recall
• www.takethekitcampaign.co.uk (#takethekit)

Medical I.D.
• www.medicalert.org
• www.laurenshope.com
Q&A
CONNECT

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