

Baby food allergies vs intolerances – telling them apart and tackling them

An allergy is our immune system's reaction to a substance it perceives as harmful. The severity of the reaction can vary greatly from person to person and can also increase or decrease over time. A food intolerance does not involve the immune system, may have less severe reactions than an allergy but can be harder to diagnose. Here are some things to bear in mind.

- ✧ Be aware of the main allergenic foods like: cow's milk, nuts, legumes (incl. peanuts, broad beans and other pulses), eggs, gluten, soya, fish and shellfish.
- ✧ Remember these foods can be introduced at around six months when you start weaning your baby.
- ✧ Try to introduce allergenic foods one at a time and in small amounts so you can spot an allergic reaction more easily.
- ✧ Once introduced and shown to be tolerated, try and include them in your child's usual diet, as this can minimise the risk of a future allergy.
- ✧ Don't delay the introduction of peanuts and hen's eggs until after 6-12 months, as evidence has shown this may increase the risk of an egg allergy or peanut allergy developing.
- ✧ Signs of allergies in babies can occur straight after a food is eaten, or several hours later.
- ✧ Be aware of the common allergy signs like: Swollen lips or tongue, wheezing or difficulty breathing, itchy skin, throat, tongue or eyes, rash/hives, coughing, diarrhoea, vomiting and a runny or blocked nose.
- ✧ A severe allergic reaction, or anaphylaxis, is serious so it's essential to know what to do next.

