

LETTERS

FOOD ALLERGIES IN CHILDREN

Don't forget allergy in eczemaLucy E Durham *FY1 doctor*

c/o Postgraduate Centre, Kent and Sussex Hospital, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 8AT, UK

Recent guidelines on food allergy in children and young people from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) emphasise that eczema should trigger clinicians to focus on allergy when taking a history—namely, the nature of the “food reaction”; the presence or absence of atopic diathesis (personal or family history of food allergy, eczema, allergic rhinitis, or asthma); and feeding history, including failure to thrive.¹ Not asking about these three things is a missed opportunity to identify children with food allergy and its attendant risks, including anaphylaxis and worsening eczema and asthma.

In February 2010 I audited the documentation of an allergy focused history in 17 children aged under 5 years with moderate to severe eczema by doctors in a general practice in Greater London. The presence or absence of a food reaction was recorded for no child, atopic diathesis for four children, and failure to thrive for two. I presented the findings at a practice meeting.

I re-audited in February 2011 in 15 children who had been taken to see a doctor about their eczema in the previous year. Food reaction was recorded for one child, atopic diathesis for seven children, and failure to thrive for two. None was asked all three questions.

The three audit criteria closely mirror NICE guidelines. My results show that general practitioners did not consider food allergy in children with eczema and that practice based audit did not improve practice. This may be because of a lack of awareness, a lack of guidelines until recently, and conflicting advice from specialists.

Competing interests: None declared.

1 Sackeyfio A, Senthinathan A, Kandaswamy P, Barry PW, Baker M. Diagnosis and assessment of food allergy in children and young people: summary of NICE guidance. *BMJ* 2011;342:d74. (23 February.)

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2011;342:d2294