

Editorial comments on: “The burden of food allergy on children and teens: A systematic review”



Michael Golding

Understanding the impact and burden that food allergy has on children and adolescents is critical for the optimal management of food allergy. A particularly challenging time is managing allergy care in the adolescent years as they transition to independent and competent self-management of their allergies. The recent EAACI guidelines on the effective transition of adolescents and young adults with allergy and asthma recognized the psychological issues commonly experienced in this age group and their impact on self-management, care coordination, and treatment planning. The guidelines highlighted the importance of identification and management of psychological issues impacting disease control and health-related quality of life.¹ While there are several reviews which address health-related quality of life (HRQL) and psychosocial functioning of parents of children with food allergy,² few reviews have comprehensively assessed the burden experienced by children and adolescents living with food allergy themselves.

We highlight here an article by Golding et al, who provide a comprehensive overview of the burden of food allergy as experienced by children and adolescents by systematically reviewing both the quantitative and qualitative literature.³ As expected, the review found that food allergy had a negative impact on HRQL of children and adolescents and specifically the domains of social, emotional, and physical functioning. Of concern, and with relevance to the transition to self-care, HRQL appeared to decline further as children age with a greater burden experienced by adolescents. With regard to psychosocial function, children and adolescents with food allergy experienced more symptoms of anxiety and depression compared to comparison groups. Bullying was also reported

The burden of food allergy on children and teens: A systematic review

45 studies
quantitative synthesis

9 studies
qualitative synthesis



- Food allergy has a **negative impact on the health-related quality of life (HRQL)** of children and teens, particularly older children and those with more severe manifestations;
- Children and teens with food allergy had **lower levels of psychosocial functioning**;
- **Bullying** was also reported among 20–32% of children;
- Parent reports of child functioning (i.e., HRQL & mental health) were lower than the ratings provided by the child themselves.

Careful consideration of the **choice of informant** is needed, and further research should be aimed at determining the source and consequences of these discrepancies as well as the **social impacts** of food allergy on children and teens.

Lastly, clinicians would be well advised to avoid solely relying on HRQL when assessing the impact of food allergy on the child.



Linked article: This is an editorial comment on Golding MA, et al. To view this article visit <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/pai.13743>.

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among 20–29% of children with food allergy. The review expanded upon the traditional quantitative approach to capture the voices of children and adolescents living with food allergy, by performing a qualitative analysis using a thematic synthesis approach. The themes identified suggested that the impact of food allergy on HRQL was largely due to the impact of food allergy on their social lives and the concerns that result from the inherent unpredictability of food allergy. A third theme emerged which described a propensity for children and teens to downplay the adverse consequences of their food allergy; while on the one hand, this could reflect resilience or only minor challenges experienced, the authors highlight that “downward comparisons and positive reframing can also be seen as emotion-focused coping techniques that aim to mitigate the negative emotions associated with the burdens that fail to improve with time and experience.”³

There were notable discrepancies depending on who reported the outcomes with parents appearing to over-report the impact of food allergy on HRQL compared to their offspring. This has important implications for future research regarding the choice of informant for child and teen outcomes. In addition, the literature to date has not revealed whether particular types of food allergy yield a different impact on HRQL or mental health, which is important for identifying patients most vulnerable to the psychosocial impacts of food allergy who would benefit from targeted interventions. Finally, the authors highlighted the need for further research on relationship between food allergy and bullying and predictors of psychological distress among children and teens with food allergy. The interested reader will find recent articles published in *Pediatric Allergy and Immunology* on similar issues related to food allergy.^{4–6}

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No Conflict of Interest.

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