

NEWS



Eating peanuts in early years reduces allergy risk even with later abstinence

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Children at high risk for peanut allergy who are treated with early peanut exposure from infancy to age 5 remain at low risk even after avoiding eating peanuts for a year, shows a UK study that indicates long lasting benefit from early exposure.¹

Peanut allergy is a common and potentially life threatening food allergy. A study published last year found that sustained peanut consumption beginning in the first 11 months of life reduced the rate of peanut allergy at age 5 by 81% when compared with avoiding peanuts.^{2 3}

To understand more about the mechanism underlying this protection against an allergic response and whether this might be lost without continued exposure to the allergen, the researchers asked all of the initial participants to avoid peanuts for 12 months to see whether their peanut allergy returned.

Some 556 of the 628 children (88.5%) taking part in the primary trial moved on to the second phase of avoiding peanuts.

Adherence was high, at 90.4% in the group who had avoided peanuts in the first phase and 69.3% in those previously allowed to eat them.

Results showed that children who had previously consumed peanuts remained at significantly lower risk of peanut allergy than those who avoided them throughout: fewer than one in 20 in the first group (4.8%; 13 of 270 children) had peanut allergy at age 6, compared with nearly one in five (18.6%; 52 of 280) of the continued avoidance group ($P<0.001$).

Three new cases of peanut allergy developed in each group, suggesting that children who had previously consumed peanuts were no more likely to develop the allergy than those who had avoided them throughout the study (3.6% versus 4.8%; $P=0.25$).

Gideon Lack, the lead author, from King's College, London, said, "The aim of our study was to find out whether infants who had consumed peanut in the LEAP study would remain protected against peanut allergy after they stopped eating peanut for 12 months. LEAP-ON clearly demonstrates that the majority of infants did in fact remain protected and that the protection was long lasting."

Skin prick testing showed that the low levels of Ara h 2 specific IgE (Ara h 2 is a component of peanut protein) and high ratios of peanut specific IgG4:IgE seen at age 5 in children who consumed peanuts from infancy were maintained after 12 months of not eating peanuts.

"This observation suggests that their nonallergic status remained stable," the researchers said. They recommended longer term studies to see whether this continues.

- 1 Du Toit G, Sayre PH, Roberts G, et al. Effect of avoidance on peanut allergy after early peanut consumption. *N Engl J Med* 2016; doi:10.1056/NEJMoa1514209.
- 2 Du Toit G, Roberts G, Sayre PH, et al. Randomized trial of peanut consumption in infants at risk for peanut allergy. *N Engl J Med* 2015;372:803-13.
- 3 Kmiotowicz Z. Risk of peanut allergy can be reduced by 80% by including peanuts in infant diets, study finds. *BMJ* 2015;350:h1001.

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