



## **Education**

### **Food Allergy: Sending Your Child to School**

Sending a child with food allergies to school or child care can be scary at first. Giving up some of the control over your child's snacks and meals is hard to do. But, with proper planning, education, and cooperation, your child can have a safe and healthy year at school.

#### **Educate Your Child's Teacher and Classmates**

- Write an Action Plan. Document all the information about your child's food allergy in a one-page summary and give it to the school nurse and your child's teacher. Have your doctor sign the paper.
- Give the school staff a list of ingredients that your child needs to avoid.
- Give your child's medicine to the teacher or school nurse. Tell them how to store the medicine. Provide written instructions (signed by a doctor) for how and when to use it.
- Talk to the class about your child's allergy. If possible, show the class a video such as Alexander, the Elephant Who Couldn't Eat Peanuts.

#### **Encourage Cooperation**

- Ask your teacher how he or she prefers to communicate with parents. Some like to use the phone or email. Make a plan for how often and when you will talk to the teacher.
- Ask your teacher to tell you in advance before there are any parties or other food-related activities (including food crafts).
- Send a thank you card to the teacher or food service staff when something goes well.

#### **Guide Your Child**

Children as young as 4 or 5 can be taught that they have a part to play in managing their food allergies.

Give your child simple rules such as:

- Do NOT trade food.
- Do NOT eat food unless it comes from home.
- IMMEDIATELY tell an adult when you think you may have eaten a food containing the allergen. (Review specific words and gestures that your child should use to get an adults attention quickly.)
- Always wear your Medic Alert bracelet or necklace the condition and treatment inscribed on it.

When your child can read, teach him or her how to read labels on packages.

#### **Provide Ideas for Handling the Allergy**

Spend some time at the child care center or school and watch how the staff handles meals and snacks. Find out who chooses the menu and what they serve. Help these people come up with a plan for your child's allergy. You can also:

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- Have your child always sit at the end of the table at lunch by responsible friends.
- Suggest that the lunch room have a special table set up for kids that are not eating certain foods for lunch. For example, a peanut-free table for your child and any other children that did not bring peanut butter or peanuts to school.
- Volunteer to help with snacks and party treats.
- Give your teacher some boxes of snacks or acceptable foods to keep in the classroom in case your child needs a snack or the teacher has forgotten to tell you about an activity or event.
- Send your child to school with a treat he can eat if the class is having something that he cannot eat.

For resources to help develop a policy for managing food allergies, see "Guidelines for Managing Students with Food Allergies," available on the FAAN Web site.

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