

# Happily ever after

(with allergies)

Once upon a time, a child who couldn't eat peanuts or drink milk was almost as rare as a fairy godmother.

By Marygrace Taylor



he world is a different place today: One in 12 children under 18 have a food allergy (reactions to peanuts, milk, and shellfish are the most common), according to a major national survey recently published in *Pediatrics*. But this doesn't have to be a grim fate: Here, the positive ways that food allergies are being dealt with in research labs, at doctor's offices, and among families at home.

## The story behind food allergies

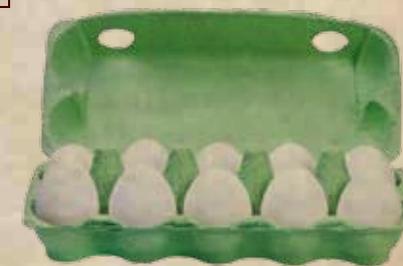
First, let's see what actually happens when someone has an allergic reaction. If a person is allergic to a specific type of food, her body reacts to the food as if it were a dangerous invader. The immune system creates antibodies (protective proteins) designed to fight off the offending food, similar to the way it creates antibodies to battle colds or the flu. When the person consumes the food she's allergic to (or sometimes, even touches or inhales it), the antibodies respond, causing an allergic reaction in the form of itchy skin, tingling in the mouth or throat, swelling, stomach pain, or wheezing.

In extremely serious cases, the person can go into anaphylaxis, a life-threatening condition characterized by difficulty breathing, nausea, and a loss of consciousness.

What causes food allergies—and why have the numbers risen so drastically? “Genetics play some role, but we think allergies are also related to a combination of environmental factors,” says Anna Nowak-Wegryzn, M.D., a clinician and clinical researcher at the Jaffe Food Allergy Institute at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City. It could be related to when infants start solids, since doing so before 4 months is linked to an increased risk of eczema. It could also be related to the timing of introducing specific foods: Some studies suggest that babies who first try wheat, peanuts, or eggs after 6 months are predisposed to develop allergies, says Nowak-Wegryzn. Other possible factors:

❧ **The growing prevalence of c-sections.** It's possible that when babies miss exposure to beneficial vaginal flora (good bacteria), their bodies won't be prepared to process certain foods.

❧ **Decreased contact with natural dirt and germs.** Children who live on farms or in similar environments that aren't sparkling clean have been shown to have lower incidences of allergies and asthma.



❧ **Increased exposure to foods that have been genetically modified.** Babies could be exposed to a non-GM food protein in utero, and a GM food protein after birth, or vice versa, causing the body to recognize one of the proteins as foreign.

Many children outgrow their allergies. Up to 80 percent of milk, wheat, and soy allergies and about two-thirds of egg allergies disappear by the time a child turns five. But “the longer an allergy persists, the less likely it is to be outgrown,” says Rushani Weerasooriya Saltzman, M.D., attending physician at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia's (CHOP) Division of Allergy and Immunology. If it seems like a child is outgrowing her allergy, her doctor might recommend that she take part in a food challenge. During a challenge, a doctor gives a child a tiny amount of the allergen, usually hidden in pudding or applesauce. If the child doesn't have a reaction, she's served increasingly larger quantities of the allergen over the course of a few hours. If the child can eat an entire serving of the allergen without a reaction, she's no longer considered allergic, says Saltzman, who runs hundreds of food challenges a year at CHOP. “All challenges are done in a hospital unit, so we have access to emergency rooms and critical care,” she says.

## Help on the horizon?

Unfortunately, for kids whose allergies remain, there's not yet a cure. Patients prevent reactions by avoiding the allergen, and are also taught how to inject epinephrine, a medicine that quickly relaxes airway muscles and tightens blood vessels, in the event of anaphylaxis.

Research is under way to treat food allergies more effectively, says Nowak-Wegryzn. She's conducted studies where children with milk or egg allergies are given foods containing *baked* milk or egg. “There are changes that happen to food proteins during baking. For milk and eggs, baking can reduce their level of allergenicity,” Nowak-Wegryzn says. Other researchers are working on ways to teach the immune system that allergens aren't actually a threat to the body. In a study from the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University, peanut proteins were attached to the surface of blood cells of peanut-allergic mice. When the blood cells were injected back into the mice, the mice no longer had an allergic reaction. “The immune system was fooled into thinking the peanut protein wasn't dangerous anymore,” says co-lead study author Stephen Miller, Ph.D. He thinks that clinical trials with people could begin in three to five years.

### How parents help kids manage their food allergies

Since kids are often diagnosed with allergies when they're very young, they need age-appropriate help learning the foods they have to avoid and why. After 8-year-old Andrew Bimm was diagnosed with peanut, tree nut, and kiwifruit allergies at age 1, his parents began telling him that he could only eat the foods they gave him, or he could get sick. Even as a toddler, he went along to the store with his parents and they showed him which foods were and weren't safe to eat. As he started school and became more aware of his allergies, he began feeling anxious about them. "The best thing was talking to older kids in the same situation," says his mom, Marnie. "Andrew felt more relaxed after talking with a seventh-grade boy, who helped him understand how to protect himself by reading food labels."

As kids get older, they often become more comfortable dealing with their allergies, and can do so more independently than younger kids. Danielle Breach watches her 11-year-old son, Drew, read labels at home without having to remind him—and has come to trust him to know exactly what he can and can't eat when he's with friends or at sleepovers. "His ability to be responsible and take initiative at home allows me to know that he'll do the same when he's not home," she says. "Still, other parents get nervous. So I give him

### Kids' advice to other kids

"Having a food allergy makes picking out foods harder, because you always have to read labels. But you can feel good, because you're choosing foods that are healthier for your body!"  
—Anna Lane Hill, age 9

"When you go to new restaurants, find out what you can and can't eat by checking the menu ahead of time."  
—Drew Breach, age 11

"When you're little, always check with your mom before you eat anything. And it might get easier when you're older, because you might outgrow some of your allergies."  
—Andrew Bimm, age 8

index cards with a list of his allergens and his doctor's contact information, just in case he does have a reaction."

### Keeping food fun—for the whole family

**Find ways to accommodate everyone.** Marnie Bimm creates a safe environment for Andrew by keeping the foods he's allergic to out of the house and finding safe substitutions. "We make chocolate chip cookies from scratch with nut-free chocolate," she says. And siblings can still enjoy their favorite foods that are off-limits at home. "My husband occasionally takes our older son out to eat Chinese food, since our son really enjoys it but we can't bring it in the house."

**Connect with your food.** Growing, cooking, or just shopping for food can help kids enjoy the things they're able to eat. "We grow vegetables and fruit and keep dairy goats," says Hope Hill, whose 9-year-old daughter, Anna Lane, is allergic to wheat, soy, peanuts, and tree nuts. "The kids really enjoy spending time in the garden and getting what's fresh."  
**Emphasize variety.** Drew Breach is allergic to several vegetables, so his mom, Danielle, tries to prepare the ones he *can* eat in lots of different ways—like broccoli with cheese, or grilled broccoli, or broccoli that's been marinated and sautéed. "When a child is limited to a few specific foods, it's important to keep those foods interesting by switching up the way they're prepared," she says.

### The two things parents of allergic kids want everyone to know

**FOOD ALLERGIES AREN'T A JOKE** A child with a food allergy isn't just a picky eater—in some cases, merely coming into contact with the food could cause a serious reaction. "We've met people who think that someone who eats a food he's allergic to will just feel a little sick," says Nicole Brennan; she and her son Oliver, 2, are both allergic to soy, corn, seafood, wheat, and dairy (and they're each allergic to other foods as well). "But an allergy really can be a matter of life or death, so we aren't being overly cautious."

**A HEADS-UP MEANS A LOT** Food allergies are more common than ever, but it doesn't stop the kids and families who deal with them from feeling like the odd men out sometimes. When it's your turn to supply snacks for the soccer team, for instance, let all the parents know what you're bringing. "We would never expect someone to rearrange anything to accommodate us, but when we know what's coming, we can plan for ourselves accordingly," says Hill.



## ur allergy-friendly cookbook is almost here!

KIWI's first-ever cookbook is coming out this spring, and it's all about eating allergy-free. *Allergy-Friendly Food for Families* (Andrews McMeel) hits shelves on April 10—but we're so excited, we couldn't wait to give you a preview and share one of our favorite recipes. Learn more, and find out how to preorder your copy, at [kiwimagonline.com/cookbook](http://kiwimagonline.com/cookbook).

### Giant Cookie Cake

Forget those cookie cakes you get from the mall. This double-layer confection is tastier, healthier, and free of dairy, eggs, gluten, nuts, and soy!

**Active time:** 20 minutes

**Total time:** 2 hours, 30 minutes

2 cups sorghum flour	1 cup brown sugar
½ cup tapioca starch	½ cup raw cane sugar
½ cup potato starch	¼ cup molasses
2 teaspoons baking powder	2 tablespoons ground flaxseed whisked with ¼ cup warm water
1 teaspoon salt	2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1½ teaspoon xanthan gum	1 cup gluten-free, dairy-free, soy-free chocolate chips
1 cup soy-free, non-hydrogenated margarine, softened	

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Thoroughly grease two 9-inch-round cake pans.
2. In a medium bowl, add the sorghum flour, tapioca starch, potato starch, baking powder, salt, and xanthan gum. Mix to combine.
3. In a large bowl or stand mixer, beat the margarine until soft, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the sugar and beat 1 to 2 more minutes. Add the molasses, flaxseed mixture, and vanilla and beat again until well mixed.
4. Working in batches, add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients, mixing until well combined. Fold in the chocolate chips.
5. Divide the batter evenly among the two cake pans, smoothing the tops with a spatula (the batter will be very sticky). Bake for 20 to 30 minutes, or until the edges are golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool completely on wire racks.
6. When cookie cakes are cooled, run a butter knife around the edge of each cake to help loosen it from the pan, then remove both cakes from their pans.

#### To assemble:

Place one cake on a plate or cake plate, rounded side up. Frost with half of the Dairy-Free Vanilla Frosting (recipe at right), then top with the remaining cake, rounded side up. Frost the top with the other half of the frosting. Refrigerate until one hour before serving.

#### Serves 16

Per serving: calories 498, fat 23 g, protein 2 g, carbohydrates 81 g, dietary fiber 3 g

### DAIRY-FREE VANILLA FROSTING

½ cup soy-free, non-hydrogenated margarine, softened
¾ cups powdered sugar
3 tablespoons rice milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

In a large bowl or stand mixer, beat the margarine until soft. Add the powdered sugar in batches, then add the rice milk and vanilla extract. Beat 3 to 5 minutes, or until light and fluffy. If not using right away, refrigerate, then allow the mixture to return to room temperature before frosting.

