

## How Do Families Cope with Food Allergies?

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Denver, CO — Families with food-allergic children face a life of constant vigilance and the looming fear of life-threatening allergic reactions. This fear can have a huge impact on an entire family's life, from heightened anxiety to severe limits on their daily activities. Some families cope well with this situation, while others find it extremely stressful and difficult to manage. Mary Klinnert, PhD, Associate Professor of Pediatrics at National Jewish Health, has received a \$450,000 grant from the NIH to study how different families adapt to life with food allergies, and to discover what helps the best-adapted families cope well.

"Families with food-allergic children must live with the high likelihood that their child will someday be rushed to the hospital to treat a sudden and severe allergic reaction," said Dr. Klinnert. "Although the actual number of food-allergy deaths is low, it can still be very frightening. We believe this grant will help us find ways to help families better cope with this difficult situation."

An estimated 3 million children in the United States have food allergies. More than 50,000 people suffer severe, anaphylactic reactions to food every year. Almost 10,000 children are hospitalized, and about 150 to 200 die.

Families have a range of responses to their children's food allergies. Available data suggest that half of parents with food-allergic children experience a pervasive fear for their child's safety, and a sizable subgroup restrict normal child and family activities because of food allergies. Others do not appreciate the potential severity of a food-allergy reaction and are casual about their precautions and preparations.

Previous research by Dr. Klinnert suggests that balanced responders successfully incorporate necessary precautions into their lives without undue anxiety. They realistically understand that their child's chance of having a severe food-allergy reaction is 'very likely,' but that the chance of dying is 'very unlikely.'

The goal of Dr. Klinnert's research is to better understand the various coping strategies these different groups use.

Dr. Klinnert and her colleagues will seek to develop an interview-based measure of families' food-allergy management and adaptation. They will study 60 families of children age 6-12 with confirmed food allergies. Parents will complete a questionnaire about the impact of the child's food allergy on the family. Parents and children will also complete a self-evaluation on general anxiety levels. All families will participate in a video-recorded interview discussing how they handle food-allergy management at home. Doctors will individually and collaboratively review and create a scale based on responses.

"With this tool it will be possible to evaluate families' adaptation to their children's food allergies, to determine how many families have significant distress or difficulty managing, and to develop services for families with difficulties coping," said Dr. Klinnert.

Anyone interested in participating in this trial can call 303-398-1006 for more information.

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### Media Contacts

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

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