What is an allergy food challenge?
A food challenge involves giving small amounts of a food which it is not clear if you/your child are allergic to, while being closely observed.

Why is a food challenge needed?
This is the best test of whether someone is or is not allergic or intolerant to a particular food. Sometimes skin prick tests or blood tests do not give us a clear answer so a food challenge is needed. They are sometimes used to confirm if someone has grown out of their allergy.

There are a few things you should know prior to the food challenge:
It is very important that anti-histamines are stopped for at least three days before the food challenge as this may mask the reaction. If you have needed to use them for any reason in that time please contact the Allergy Team (01225 821545).

Any other medication such as asthma treatments (including Montelukast) should be continued as usual.

The food challenge will not be performed when someone is unwell (diarrhoea, vomiting, wheeze or temperature). Please let us know as soon as possible if you are unable to attend the appointment and we will rearrange the challenge.

Antihistamines to stop at least 3 days before challenge

- Promethazine (*Phenergan®*)
- Alimemazine (*Vallergan®*)
- Chlorehlenamine (*Pirition®*)
- Desloratidine (*Neoclarityn®*)
- Fexofenadine (*Telfast®*)
- Levocetirizine (*Xyzal®*)
- Loratidine (*Clarityn®*)
- Mizolastine (*Mizollen®*)
- Certirizine (*Zirtek®, Piriteze®*)

Things to bring with you
Although there are some activities available it is a good idea to bring some games, a laptop or books along, particularly for older children. We also suggest bringing a book or magazine for whoever is accompanying the patient as it can get a bit boring!
Bring any asthma reliever (blue) inhalers and your antihistamines or autoinjector/ Epipen® if you have them. We do also have supplies of these in the department if they are needed. You can bring a small amount of food which you know does not cause any problems with to have at the end of the challenge if needed. Drinking water is available in the department but you may want to bring any other cold drinks.

We often ask you to bring a small quantity of the food to be tested with you e.g. a small packet of nuts, sesame snap, biscuits etc. The doctor will have told you what to bring. Call the department if you are unsure (01225 821545)

What happens during a food challenge?

Please come to Children's Outpatients (Dept B11)

Please expect to stay all morning in the department for the challenge. If you/your child have a reaction they may need to be observed for longer.

At the start of the challenge blood pressure, pulse rate, blowing tests will be monitored and repeated at regular intervals after that as needed. When you arrive tell the nursing staff that you are here for a challenge so that they know to get started with the first observations.

If you are worried at any time during the challenge you can speak to one of the doctors or a nurse. You will also be shown the emergency buzzer in case you need help quickly. Because the challenge is done slowly it is very rare for any severe reactions to occur.

How is the food given?

We usually start the challenge by rubbing the inside of the lip with the food. If no reaction occurs the challenge will continue. This involves eating or drinking a very small quantity of the suspected food in increasing amounts, usually at 15 minute intervals. The food we suspect may be given as an ingredient in another food, for example biscuits/cake containing egg.

The challenge continues until a sufficient amount of food has been consumed for us to be happy there will not be any reaction. Observation in the department continues for a period of about an hour and then we will usually allow you to go to the café or another part of the hospital for a while before going home.

What will happen at the end of the challenge?

If the challenge is negative
If there are no symptoms during the food challenge, then it is no longer necessary to exclude the particular food from the diet. We advise not having any more of the test food on the day of the challenge but it can be reintroduced the following day.

If the challenge is positive
If allergic symptoms develop while trying the food, the challenge will be stopped and you will be reviewed by a doctor or nurse. Treatment with the appropriate medications will be given if needed you will be closely monitored by nursing and medical staff. Before you go home the doctor will ensure that it is safe to leave.
In case of a positive challenge, we will write to your GP, with a copy to you/ your family and school nurse where appropriate. We will usually book a follow up appointment with your consultant at the allergy unit. Where necessary the dietitian will also give advice.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of the challenge?**

There is the risk of developing an allergic reaction during the food challenge. This will be dealt with immediately by the medical team who will be present in the department at all times.

**What if there is a problem?**

If there are any problems later in the day/night after the challenge please contact the Children’s Ward on 01225 824221 for advice. Explain that you had a challenge done.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the challenge later on please contact the Allergy Team on 01225 821545 or talk to your GP. If the secretary is away there will be an answer-phone. Please leave a message and we will get back to you. If you just want to update us please make that clear and we will just update the notes.

*Thank you for taking the time to read this.*

*If you have any questions please ask the Allergy Team who will be more than happy to deal with any query you may have.*