

# Patient information

## Sesame seed allergy

### Background

- Sesame is a common ingredient in foods in countries in the Mediterranean, Middle East and Asia. As it is now more common in foods in the UK, allergy to sesame in children in the UK has increased.
- Foods often containing sesame include:
  - Middle eastern dishes like tahini (paste), hummus and halva (a Greek sweet)
  - Bakery products eg bread sticks, burger baps/rolls, cocktail biscuits, muesli bars
  - Dips, salad dressings
  - Vegetarian foods eg vege-burgers
- Sesame oil used in cooking does have a detectable amount of sesame protein and so can cause an allergic reaction in sensitive individuals.
- People have also reported allergic reactions to sesame in Chinese, Thai and Japanese foods, stir fry vegetables and health food snacks containing sesame.
- Sesame oil is sometimes used in cosmetics and personal care products where it may be labelled under the Latin name *sesamum indicum*.
- Sesame may occasionally be present in pharmaceuticals. Always ask your chemist to obtain full ingredients in any prescribed medicine.
- Children allergic to one type of seed do not necessarily need to avoid all other seeds (e.g. poppy, sunflower, rapeseed and linseed).

## Symptoms

- The majority of children present with urticaria (hives) with or without angioedema (swelling), and to a lesser extent with gastrointestinal symptoms such as abdominal pain.
- Children with sesame allergy are at risk of severe reactions (anaphylaxis). It is difficult to predict which children are at risk of severe reactions.

## Diagnosis

- Symptoms or history **MUST** be confirmed by an allergy test to make the diagnosis.
- Tests are skin prick test, blood test for IgE antibodies or dietary challenge if needed.

## Treatment

- Allergy to sesame needs to be taken seriously. With the proper care the risks are small.
- There is no treatment for sesame allergy, so dietary information and careful avoidance of sesame s necessary to prevent reactions. The dietitian can give further information.
- Emergency treatment for accidental contact (*follow the instructions on your Emergency Action Plan*).

## Outcome

- Studies have however shown that a small number (approximately 20-30%) may outgrow their allergy. The decision to allow sesame back into a diet should be made with the team in the Allergy Clinic.

*With thanks to the Children's Allergy Clinic, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust, for permission to reproduce this information.*

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