

## In the news

### ALLERGISTS SAY DO NOT (TRY THIS AT HOME?)

Peanuts can cause severe allergic reactions and even death. It makes sense to keep the kids away from them, right? Actually, this may be a bad idea. A new trial has found that feeding peanuts to young infants may stop them from developing a peanut allergy in the first place.

In the trial, which was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers fed a peanut-based snack to high-risk babies (they had egg allergies or eczema) who had not yet developed peanut allergies. Their risk of developing a peanut allergy by 5 years of age was cut by more than 80% (*BBC News*, 23 Feb 2015).

Professor Gideon Lack from King's College London, UK, who led the trial, says that current practices of avoiding potentially allergenic foodstuffs may be all wrong: "At least with respect to peanuts, avoidance may actually worsen the problem" (*Wall Street Journal*, 23 Feb 2015).

Other allergy specialists agree and suggest that current health guidelines may need to be revised: "The World Health Organization recommends that you avoid peanuts if you are allergic. Present results suggest the opposite ..." said Dr. Lee Tak Hong, from the Hong Kong Sanatorium and Hospital (*CNN*, 24 Feb 2015).

One theory is that an allergic immune response may develop if babies are first exposed to peanut proteins through the skin, rather than through the digestive tract. To avoid this, Lack suggests that once infants are weaned they should start to consume peanut products on a regular basis (*The Australian*, 24 Feb 2015).

The team say that the next stage of their work is to see if the children in the study group remain protected from peanut allergies, even if they stop consuming peanuts. They also caution that parents of infants with allergies should seek medical advice before feeding their children peanuts. (*Telegraph*, 23 Feb 2015).

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