



## **Confirming Food Allergies – Relieved or Upset?**

Having food allergies confirmed can often leave parents, and carers, feeling either relieved or upset.

Personally, having my son's allergies confirmed was a relief. Although in theory I already knew he had food allergies and had consequently changed his diet, I felt reassured to know for sure. Not only that, I no longer had the words "paranoid first-time mother" in the back of my mind!!

On the other hand, I can perfectly understand how people can feel upset. Upset that the condition has been confirmed as opposed to a "maybe" or perhaps overwhelmed by what the future may hold.

In either case, I think that the following five points can be of great help when food allergies are first confirmed and I still apply them now!

### ***1. Think positive, be positive!***

It's a bit of a cliché I know, but I'm a great believer in positive thinking. Not only will being positive about the situation help you but it will help your child – don't forget even babies and toddlers can pick up on your mood and feelings. So if you begin to dread mealtimes, it can have a negative effect on your little one.

### ***2. Get organised, be in control!***

One of the key aspects of successfully managing food allergies is being organised – this will give you a sense of control and you won't find yourself stuck in a situation of a hungry baby/toddler and nothing suitable to eat! Being organised includes meal planning, batch cooking and freezing, and advanced planning for outings, special occasions and holidays.

### ***3. Be proactive, not reactive!***

This is another great slogan that really does apply to managing food allergies especially if dealing with stubborn toddlers! Try to anticipate what might happen in certain situations and be prepared for them. Encourage your little one to have a varied diet within the food types that they can eat so they can enjoy the maximum choice.

### ***4. Be consistent!***

This point is all about helping your little one to learn. All young children seem to go through a phase where everything goes into their mouth...and when out and about this can include the half eaten biscuit that's been discarded on the floor by another child!! Of course, for an allergic toddler this could be extremely dangerous. By being consistent, my little boy (now aged 19 months) understands that when we are out all his food comes from his special food bag.

Even if he finds something on the floor that in theory he could eat, like a raisin, he knows that he's not allowed to. By having consistent rules, it's enabled him to learn and makes life a bit easier for me (having said that I still watch him like a hawk!).

### ***5. Enjoy!***

And finally make sure you still enjoy food and mealtimes. Don't turn food preparation into a chore or mealtimes into a battlefield. You can still have fun - eat together as a family, enjoy colourful meals, make homemade biscuits in exciting shapes or animals.

***Article written by Lucy Cahil, March 2007***

***Please note that this article is not intended to provide any professional / medical advice. For advice, always consult your GP or dietician.***