

Starting Peanut Allergy Immunotherapy



What parents and patients need to know

Stephanie Polk's 10-year-old daughter Olivia has successfully avoided peanut since she was diagnosed with a peanut allergy at 2 years of age. As Olivia approaches middle school in Alexandria, Virginia, Stephanie worries the potential for exposure could increase in a new environment.

Has she considered exploring peanut allergy immunotherapy as a treatment option?

"It's in the back of my mind," she says. "I have some anxiety about exposing Olivia to her food allergen. We'll wait to see how the school handles it and talk with teachers and the school nurse about the level of risk.

"The only way she would be exposed to peanut is if she were to eat someone else's snack or there's a school party with food. Olivia is pretty smart about being careful what she eats."

The decision to consider peanut allergy immunotherapy is often a highly personal one for families. Immunotherapy not a cure; rather, it's designed to reduce the frequency and severity of allergic reactions, including life-threatening anaphylaxis, following an accidental exposure to peanut.

Oral immunotherapy (OIT) involves taking a small amount of peanut powder by one of two ways:

Is it right for you or your child?

Allergists work with you to make sure OIT is a shared decision that is evidence-based, not fear-based.

Several factors can play a role in your decision:

- How have you or your child fared with strict avoidance of peanut?
- What is the risk of exposure?
- How severe are the allergic reactions to peanut?

Trust your sources

When considering OIT, it's important to make sure you're accessing trustworthy sources of information, says Douglas Jones, MD, a board-certified allergist and immunologist and food allergy specialist from the Tanner Clinic in Layton, Utah.

"With food allergy in general, there is so much information out there, and probably just as much misinformation," Dr. Jones says. "Then you add food allergy treatment options such as immunotherapy on top of that, and sometimes you may think: Where do I go? How do I even make decisions about this?

"Ask yourself: Are my sources of information credible and trustworthy? What online resources am I using and what websites am I going to? What social media outlets do I visit and are they trustworthy? Getting good solid information is the first step."

OIT should be done by allergists with expertise in food



allergy and with experience in managing patients through every stage of immunotherapy. "Be sure to ask your allergist about their experience and training with OIT and what steps are taken to maximize safety," Dr. Jones adds.

Evaluate pros and cons

Many peanut-allergic patients don't necessarily want to eat their allergen; they simply want protection against accidental exposure.

Talk with your allergist about the pros and cons of peanut allergy immunotherapy – including cost – and determine whether the benefits outweigh the risks, such as potential side effects. Discuss the differences in undergoing OIT with an office-prepared product or Palforzia.

For some patients, avoidance of peanut may be most appropriate and preferred. Just keep two epinephrine auto-injectors close by in case of an accidental exposure and have an anaphylaxis emergency plan in place.

For others, OIT may be recommended if accidental exposures to peanut result in severe allergic reactions of if they want to consume peanuts regularly as part of their diet.

"What are your goals with immunotherapy? Why do you want to pursue this? When you focus in on that why, all the processes, protocols and procedures become clear to you and your decisions start to fall into place," Dr. Jones says.

- Palforzia® (manufactured by Aimmune Therapeutics) is a capsule containing a measured dose of peanut powder that is administered under the supervision of a board-certified allergist. At this time it's only for children between the ages of 4 to 17. Patients are given gradually increasing amounts of the powder until a tolerance level is reached; then the patient stays on that dose indefinitely. Palforzia® is the first peanut allergy treatment approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
- An allergist who specializes in peanut allergy desensitization carefully prepares and administers a non-pharmaceutical grade peanut product using specific protocols. While these commercial products are not FDA-approved as a food allergy treatment, they have shown proven benefits for thousands of patients.

In addition to OIT, other products and methods of peanut allergy immunotherapy continue to be studied,

but are not available as a treatment or approved by FDA.

Epicutaneous immunotherapy (EPIT) involves an adhesive patch attached to the skin containing a tiny dose of peanut protein. Viaskin™ Peanut (manufactured by DBV Technologies), commonly called the peanut patch, works by desensitizing patients to peanut and increasing tolerance. It is still in clinical trials and DBV Technologies must submit to FDA new data that supports the patch's effectiveness.

Sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT) involves placing drops of a peanut protein extract under the tongue for 2 minutes before swallowing. A 2019 study showed promise in children ages

1 to 11, but more research is needed to prove it is safe and effective.

Biologic medications such as omalizumab and etokimab are also being studied as potential peanut allergy treatments.

Allergy & Asthma Network is in communication with FDA to reinforce the importance of treatment options for those living with peanut allergy.

Additional Resources

- *AllergyAsthmaNetwork.org*
- Palforzia®: *palforzia.com*
- Viaskin™ Peanut: *dbv-technologies.com*

Reviewed by Michael Mellon, MD

For Allergists

Douglas Jones, MD, is actively involved in providing hands-on training to allergists on all available food allergy treatment options so they can safely and efficiently add oral immunotherapy to their practices.

His team at Global Food Therapy conducts live and online training for allergists. Learn more at www.gft4you.org.



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