Randomized trial of peanut consumption in infants at risk for peanut allergy

Peanut allergy, the food allergy causing the greatest numbers of anaphylaxis and death, has doubled in prevalence over the past 10 years. U.S. and U.K. clinical practice guidelines currently recommend the exclusion of allergenic foods from the diets of infants considered to be at high risk for food allergies, as well as from the diets of their mothers during pregnancy and lactation. However, studies have shown that this tactic fails to prevent the development of IgE-mediated food allergies.

Beginning in 2006, Du Toit et al., (2015) evaluated 640 infants aged 4 months up to 11 months, with and without sensitivity to food allergens as determined by skin-prick test results. The infants were randomly assigned to one of two strategies - to either consume or avoid peanuts until the age of two years. Participants were followed up to 60 months of age to compare the proportion of infants who developed a peanut allergy within the two groups.

Of the 530 infants testing negative on the initial skin-prick test, 13.7% of those in the peanut avoidance group and 1.9% in the peanut consumption group developed a peanut allergy by age 60 months (P<0.001). Of the 98 infants testing positive on the initial skin-prick test, 35.3% in the peanut avoidance group and 10.6% in the peanut consumption group developed a peanut allergy by age 60 months (P=0.004). The authors concluded that the most effective strategy to prevent the development of peanut allergy in infants at high risk is the consumption of peanuts at an early age.

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