

Peanut Desensitization (Oral Immunotherapy)

Patient information

This handout is to provide you with information related to your upcoming peanut desensitization appointment.

What are the goals of peanut desensitization?

Peanut allergy is a common medical condition that can lead to severe, sometimes life-threatening allergic reactions or anaphylaxis- which is a serious systemic reaction. The standard treatment for peanut allergy has been avoidance of peanuts and using appropriate medical therapy such as an epinephrine injector like an EpiPen®.

Recent studies suggest that some people with a peanut allergy would benefit from oral immunotherapy (peanut desensitization) during which a tiny amount of peanut is introduced and gradually increased over time.

This is done under very strict and careful supervision of allergy specialists. The goal is to make it safe for individuals where there is significant risk of accidental exposure to small amounts of peanuts. Research shows that over time, oral immunotherapy allows those with a peanut allergy to tolerate exposure without developing a severe reaction.

Initial assessment and preparation

- The clinic will confirm if the patient has a peanut allergy based on a history of allergic symptoms within one hour after eating peanuts.
- A special type of blood test to measure the patient's level of peanut specific immunoglobulin E, (an antibody in the blood that can cause allergic symptoms) will be performed.
- All patients undergoing oral immunotherapy must have at least two current (non-expired) epinephrine-containing autoinjectors (EpiPen, Jr.® or EpiPen®) with them at all times.
- Epinephrine should be used if there are any symptoms of a systemic reaction (also called anaphylaxis) to any food.

Peanut desensitization process:

- The patient will be provided with an appointment to attend the Allergy Clinic at St. Joseph's Hospital
- Where possible, patients are advised to pick up their peanut flour capsules prior to the day of their appointment, to bring to their Allergy Clinic appointment (see info on "*Peanut flour capsules*" below)
- Patients are also asked to bring a soft food item with them to each visit such as pudding, applesauce, a milkshake, etc.

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- During the first clinic visit, the patient will begin with 1 mg of peanut powder, mixed in oat flour and eaten in their soft food item.
- The same dose of peanut flour will be given daily, at home, for three to five weeks.
- The patient will be seen by one of our professionals in the clinic every three to five weeks, at which time the dose of peanut flour will be increased and the patient monitored for any reaction. These visits usually take one to two hours.
- The dose of peanut flour will be increased every month, following this schedule: 2 mg, 4 mg, 6 mg, 12 mg, 25 mg, 50 mg, 75 mg, 100 mg, 200 mg, 300 mg, 400 mg, 500 mg.
- This procedure will continue every three to five weeks, until the patient is taking a 500 mg dose of peanut flour.
- It takes approximately 14 months to reach the maximum dose.
- If the patient can complete the entire peanut powder protocol, they will start on a daily dose of the equivalent of one peanut per day, indefinitely.

Other important information

- All other medications should be continued during the peanut desensitization process.
- Patients must not do any rigorous exercise two hours before, or after, taking the peanut.
- Beta blocker medications must not be used at any time.
- Patients must contact the clinic immediately if they suspect pregnancy, or if they are suffering from significant allergy symptoms such as hay fever or asthma.
- Parents of children receiving oral immunotherapy are instructed to call the allergy clinic if their child catches a cold as this may mean taking a lower dose of peanut at home on that day.

Peanut flour capsules:

The Prescription Shop (pharmacy), located within St. Joseph's Hospital, produces the peanut flour capsules for purchase- which come in packages of 38 daily doses.

Your peanut flour capsule order will be sent to St. Joseph's Prescription Shop in advance of your first clinic visit, and will be ready for pick-up one week before your appointment.

Patients are advised to pick up their peanut flour capsules prior to the day of their appointment, to bring to their Allergy Clinic appointment. Alternatively, a credit card can be left on file and the capsules will be made available to the clinic to dispense on the day of the appointment.

St. Joseph's Prescription Shop is open Monday through Friday, from 9 am to 5:30 pm, and can be reached at: 519 646-6100 ext. 66194

Costs

Please note that the cost of the peanut flour doses and the oral immunotherapy procedure are not covered by OHIP or via private benefit programs.

There may also be a fee associated with the observation of your care as there is a doctor available on-call outside of clinic hours, to treat and watch over you during your monthly clinic visits. Please ask your doctor about the cost of this service.

Potential discomforts

Potential discomforts with the desensitization process would be similar to eating the suspected food in the past. Symptoms are usually short-lived (less than two hours) and include:

- Itchy rash
- Nausea, abdominal discomfort, vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Stuffy, runny nose and sneezing and/or wheezing.

Potential risks

A potential risk associated with the desensitization procedure is that of severe allergic reaction, called anaphylaxis. Symptoms of anaphylaxis may include:

- Itchy rash, hives
- Facial swelling
- Shortness of breath, wheezing and/or cough
- Vomiting, diarrhea
- In severe cases –low blood pressure, loss of consciousness, and rarely, death

***If any major reactions occur, emergency medical attention is required.
Call 911 or go to your nearest Emergency Department.***

For non-urgent concerns, patients can contact the Allergy Clinic directly:
Monday to Friday, between 9 am and 4:30 pm at: 519 646-6100 ext. 61353.

Note: Patients who have any concerns regarding minor reactions: **DO NOT** take more peanut until you are able to contact the clinic.