

## Teens with Allergies



About 1 in 13 teens have a food allergy. An allergic reaction occurs when the body's immune system overreacts to a food protein (an allergen). The most common food allergens are: peanuts, tree nuts, sesame seeds, soy, seafood (fish and shellfish), wheat, eggs, milk, mustard, and sulphites. Symptoms of allergic reactions can be different for everyone and may occur within minutes or hours. The most common symptoms of allergies are:

- Flushed or pale face, hives, rash, itchy skin
- Swelling of the eyes, face, lips, throat or tongue
- Coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath
- Stomach pain, diarrhea, vomiting
- Feeling anxious, weak, dizzy or faint

Food allergies are not a choice. A severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), after eating a food containing allergens, can be life threatening and occur quickly and without warning. These can be treated with an epinephrine auto injector; an EpiPen®. The only way to prevent allergic reactions is to avoid contact with the foods or ingredients that cause them.

Most teenagers with allergies are aware of how to avoid the allergen. However, as teens become more independent in social situations they may overlook possible sources of food allergens or take risks to fit in with their peers. They may not want to carry an EpiPen® or ask questions when needed. Parents of an allergic teen can help the teen to make informed choices. The parent can have the teen practice talking to others about allergies and asking questions about the foods served at restaurants, parties, and other public settings. They can talk openly with the teen about dating and the risks kissing can pose if the partner has consumed an allergen. This discussion can help the teen take charge of his allergies and give him the confidence to talk about the food allergy with his peers.

Friends and social activities are important to teens and can provide great support in managing the teen's food allergies. If your teen is a friend of, or is dating a teen with allergies, help your teen learn about allergies, how to recognize reactions and how to treat them. Food allergies are a serious medical condition but peers can help decrease some of the risks. For more information on allergies and teens see "Why Risk It?" at: [www.anaphylaxis.ca/](http://www.anaphylaxis.ca/)

## Youth and Video Games

Research has shown that playing video games (or "gaming") can affect youth in both good and bad ways. Playing certain video games can help youth to develop thinking and fine motor skills and manage anger and stress. However, gaming can also result in lower grades and reduce the time spent with family and friends. Video game play can take away time from other healthy activities and sometimes may encourage youth to act aggressively. It is up to parents to help their teen learn to enjoy video games safely and responsibly. The following questions will help parents decide whether video games are a problem for their young person:

- Is your teen playing too much? Does gaming interfere with chores, school, work, family time? Too much gaming takes time away from sports, hobbies, sleep and other healthy activities.
- Does the game fit with the household norms or values? Games that include aggression, bullying, violence and discrimination can influence a young person's developing beliefs.

Here are some ways in which parents can teach their youth to play video games appropriately:

- Make sure **play comes AFTER important tasks** like chores, school, work, meals and family time.
- Ensure play happens in a central location, not a bedroom, so it can be **monitored**.
- Set and enforce a **time limit on play**.
- Discuss with your teen the **types of games that are acceptable** to you.
- **Play together**. Playing video games as a family can be fun and allows parents to role model appropriate behaviour and monitor play.
- Balance video game time with **other fun family activities**. Invite your teen to go for a walk or a coffee, throw a ball around, go for a bike ride, play a board game, cook a meal, watch a movie or do a puzzle together.