

Babies exposed to peanuts less likely to be allergic years later, study says

An author of the study said the correlation was “extraordinary.” She advised parents that “plain old peanut butter mixed in warm water can work.”



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Children who consume peanut products from infancy are significantly less likely to develop peanut allergies by early adolescence, according to a [study](#) published Tuesday in the journal NEJM Evidence.

The study, which followed more than 500 participants until the age of 12, confirmed what previous research has found but tracked the children for longer than most previous work.

Michelle F. Huffaker, one of the authors of the study and the director of translational medicine at the University of California at San Francisco, said it was “extraordinary” to be able to demonstrate that early exposure to peanuts was correlated with a lower rate of peanut allergy lasting at least to age 12.

“It was certainly what we’d hoped to see,” she said. Another study, referred to as the [LEAP trial](#), examined children up to age 5, but “it wasn’t clear that that was necessarily enough time to prove long-term tolerance,” she added.

“We’d love to spread the word to more families and reach people that may not know about this,” she said.



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Many parents remain concerned about giving their babies peanut products and aren’t aware that it is safe and recommended by experts, [a study found last year](#).

The American Academy of Pediatrics began [advising](#) in 2017 that high-risk children should be introduced to peanuts as early as 4 to 6 months, after the child had been tested for a peanut allergy. The guideline, adopted after the LEAP trial was published, was a reversal of previous advice, released in 2000, that [told parents to avoid peanuts](#) for their babies until at least age 3.

Health authorities have warned that whole peanuts, chopped peanuts and peanut butter, can be choking hazards for infants. Peanut butter can be spread thinly on other food or mixed with breast milk, formula or purées, while peanuts can be finely ground, to reduce the risk.

Huffaker said that to expose an infant to peanuts, “there are a number of options, but plain old peanut butter mixed in warm water can work for a 4-month-old — it doesn’t need to be anything fancier than that.”

The researchers on the NEJM Evidence study — led by King’s College London, the University of California at San Francisco and the Children’s Allergy Service at the Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust in London — previously examined peanut allergies in children up to age 5, again at age 6, and then continued following the group for another six years for the latest study.

At about age 12, 15.4 percent of children who had avoided peanuts in infancy to age 5 had developed an allergy, compared with 4.4 percent who had consumed peanuts. The numbers are higher than would be expected in the general population because the study examined children that were already at a higher risk of having a peanut allergy, such as children with egg allergies or eczema, Huffaker said.

Food allergies among children in the United States doubled from 2000 to 2018, according to a Washington Post analysis of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Health Interview Survey last year. Multiple likely causes include underexposing children to potentially allergenic substances.

Across various age groups, the rate of peanut allergy prevalence in the United States was between 0.6 and 2.6 percent.

