A Dose of Peanuts Early in Life Could Prevent an Allergy in Kids

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Giving babies a little bit of peanut may prevent them from ever developing an allergy to these nuts, according to new guidelines from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). That means parents should feed their kids small quantities of the nut by the time they are 6 months old and give them regular doses if they don't have an allergic reaction, NBC News reports.

The new rules are a big change from previous NIAID guidelines that recommended parents keep peanuts and peanut products away from their kids entirely until age 3 if they had a risk of allergies. The standards were amended after several recent studies showed that giving peanut flour to kids early enough in life could teach their immune systems to recognize the nut as a safe food and stop the body from mounting an allergic reaction.

Experts advise parents to give babies tiny amounts of peanut paste or powder—never whole peanuts—at home by the time they are eating solid food. The new guidelines suggest that the parents of children between ages 4 and 6 months who are considered to be at a high risk of allergies (defined as those with severe eczema or an egg allergy) take their kids to a doctor for their first dose of peanuts. (Allergists say even if children demonstrate a sensitivity to the test, giving them this small amount of peanut may help prevent a more severe allergy to the nut from taking hold later on in life.)

"We believe this process to be very, very safe," said Anthony Fauci, MD, the director of NIAID, in a recent statement about these guidelines. In findings on this process published last year, none of the infants given small doses of peanut protein had any severe allergic reactions. Plus, the benefits of this early exposure can be enormous, according to recent studies that showed even the highest-risk kids demonstrated an 80 percent reduced chance of developing a reaction against peanuts. "That's a whole generation of children who never have to develop this allergy," Fauci noted.

If you administer the peanut test to your kids, watch out for signs of allergic reaction—including vomiting, rash, coughing, wheezing and looking lethargic or withdrawn—immediately after they eat them.

Did you know that peanut allergies are more common among African-American kids? Click here to

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