Experimental Therapy Desensitizes Kids' Peanut Allergies

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Relief may be on the way for children living with dangerous peanut food allergies. A new experimental treatment helped ease the allergies by having kids eat small amounts of peanut flour in increasing amounts over time, according to preliminary results published in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology and reported by Time.com.

The study included 99 children, between ages 7 and 16, who were allergic to peanuts. Scientists fed the children increased doses of peanut flour mixed in with their food during a six-month period, slowly upping the amount of flour from 2 milligrams to 800 milligrams, then noting the effects of the allergen.

By the end of the trial, well over half of these children could eat five peanuts at a time without experiencing dangerous allergic reactions.

The idea behind the therapy is that children's immune systems can slowly become desensitized to certain food allergies. Researchers said their goal was not to cure the allergy completely, but to simply reduce the number of severe and life-threatening reactions that might normally occur when kids with allergies come into contact with certain foods.

Health experts don't know why food allergies are rising in the United States. But some believe that America's high sanitation standards are making kids today "too clean" and unable to build up immune systems to combat common food allergies. Experts have also suggested that kids who don't eat foods such as peanuts and shellfish when they're young may develop allergies to them.

Scientists plan to test the same treatment in larger populations. If the therapy works, it has the potential to save U.S. families nearly $25 billion a year in health care costs, including nearly $4.3 billion for emergency care to allergic reactions.

Studies also show that people with African ancestry are more likely to have food allergies. Click here to read more.

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