

Childhood egg allergy a 'piece of cake' for researchers

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Young children who suffer from allergy to raw egg are being fed cake containing baked egg in a new study aimed at helping children to outgrow their allergy.

"[Egg allergy](#) is the most common [food allergy](#) in Australia, affecting 9% of young children," says University of Adelaide [PhD student](#) Merryn Netting, from the Women's and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI).

Ms Netting, who is based at the Women's and Children's Hospital, has 20 years' experience as a paediatric dietitian. She is conducting the CAKE (Can egg Allergic Kids eat baked Egg?) Study with the Women's and Children's Hospital Allergy Unit to see if small amounts of baked egg help children to more quickly overcome their allergy.

Speaking in the lead up to Food Allergy Awareness Week (13-19 May), Ms Netting says: "Ten years ago, if a child had an egg allergy we would recommend a totally egg free diet. However, our thinking on the issue has now changed – we introduce children early to baked egg, and if they tolerate it we encourage them to include it in their diet regularly. This new research is helping to put that thinking to the test."

Ms Netting says when egg is baked, the heating process destroys part of the protein in egg. "Cooking the egg changes the shape of the [molecules](#) in its protein, which means the [antibodies](#) that would normally react to the egg protein can't latch onto it. Eating baked egg is associated with

changes in the [immune system](#) that signal development of tolerance to egg, and this is why introducing baked egg can be beneficial," she says.

"The real test comes at the end of the study when we do a raw egg challenge with the child, to see if there has been any improvement in the allergy over time."

So far, about 40 children have participated in the study. More than 100 South Australian children are still needed.

"Parents know the seriousness of the problem and the range of [health issues](#) egg allergy can have for their children. That's why they want to help, so that the knowledge from studies like this one can benefit other families.

"Because of the risk of an allergic reaction, all of our food challenges are done under medical supervision," Ms Netting says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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