

# Pioneering study to investigate factors affecting how much peanut is safe to eat

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(Medical Xpress)—A new study has begun which will, for the first time, identify how factors like exercise and stress may change how much peanut can cause an allergic reaction in the UK population.

The research, being carried out by Cambridge University Hospitals, Imperial College London and The University of Manchester, will also look at whether exercise or stress make people more likely to react to peanut.

Dr Andrew Clark, allergy consultant at Cambridge University Hospitals, is the chief investigator on the TRACE study, which has been commissioned by the Food Standards Agency. He will work closely with

Professor Clare Mills from the Allergy and Respiratory Centre of The University of Manchester.

During manufacturing, non-[peanut products](#) may be contaminated by peanut residue from food made on the same machinery. [Food manufacturers](#) generally use 'may contain nuts' warnings because they can't be sure what level of accidental peanut contamination is safe. Consumers can find this type of labelling unhelpful, because it is not based on scientific evidence.

The three-year clinical study aims to find out exactly how much peanut will cause an allergic reaction and how sensitivity to peanut is altered by external factors including exercise and stress. This will help improve 'may contain traces...' type labelling, making it easier for consumers to decide which foods which are safe to eat. It could also be a blueprint for a whole range of other studies on nuts and other foodstuffs.

In the UK there are about 200-400,000 peanut allergic people and approximately 1 in 50 children have the condition.

Dr Clark, and his colleagues Dr Robert Boyle, Dr Isabel Skypala and Professor Steven Durham from Imperial College, are looking for people with a peanut allergy to participate over a period of a year. Professor Clare Mills, from The University of Manchester, is studying the peanuts used in the study and is working with Professor Iain Buchan and Dr Matt Sperrin from The University to compare UK data with European data being used in her current study into food allergies across the world known as the Integrated Approaches to Food Allergen and Allergy Risk Management study (iFAAM).

The researchers will invite around 100 peanut-allergic people from a cross-section of the population to undergo 'challenges' under varying conditions to find out how much peanut causes a reaction.

The focus area of the £1.2 million study is on exercise and stress – in this case stress caused by sleep deprivation, the two external factors thought to influence allergic thresholds.

Dr Clark said: "This study is the first of its kind in the UK, and globally, to find what external factors influence whether someone has an allergic reaction and to find out the amount of peanut that is safe for the population to consume, even after they have exercised or when they are stressed. It will not only bring reassurance to the thousands of people who are allergic to peanuts but offers a blueprint for improving food labelling for a whole variety of food.

"Addenbrooke's is one of the leading centres for allergy research and especially on [peanut allergy](#) and we are delighted to have been successful in winning the tender to conduct this ground-breaking study that will have wide implications for research into food allergies and for the whole of the food industry."

Professor Clare Mills, who is also currently leading the world's biggest study into food allergies known as the Integrated Approaches to Food Allergen and Allergy Risk Management (iFAAM), said: "[Peanut](#) allergies appear to have increased in the UK over the last 15 years and this research will play an important part in helping to make life easier for allergy sufferers."

Food Standards Agency head of food allergens Sue Hattersley said: "This important study will inform food allergen labelling and improve advice to consumers to help them better manage their allergy."

Lynne Regent, Anaphylaxis Campaign CEO, said: "We're delighted to be involved with this very exciting study. Labelling is a major concern for anyone living with severe food [allergy](#). The study will help to inform the food industry and have a positive impact upon the lives of food allergic

individuals."

Men and women between the ages of 18-45 are eligible to register. Participants will receive up to £800 for attending eight sessions at one of the two sites for the study, Addenbrooke's in Cambridge or the Royal Brompton in London.

The final results of the study will be published in the summer of 2016.

Provided by University of Cambridge

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