

College students with food allergies find big challenges in staying safe

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A study being presented at the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) Annual Scientific Meeting found most colleges don't have integrated systems in place to support food-allergic students.

"Our study found that while many colleges offer support for students with [food allergy](#) in the dining hall, the same support doesn't carry over to organized sports, dormitories or social events" says food allergy researcher Ruchi Gupta, MD, ACAAI member and lead author on the study. "That leaves students feeling vulnerable and scrambling to inform all the various departments of their needs."

The study found that while these students don't want to be defined by their allergies, they value feeling safe. They are willing to work with school officials to create more education around what administrators and other students need to know about food allergies. Peers of food allergic students believe the stress caused by food allergies could be significantly reduced by creating and engaging a community of support through peer training, awareness and increased epinephrine access.

Also at the ACAAI meeting, allergist David Stukus, MD, and ACAAI Fellow, will be presenting on how allergists can help safely transition a student with food allergies to college. "Teenagers with food allergy are the age group at highest risk for life-threatening food allergy reactions. This is mostly due to not having their epinephrine with them at all times, but they also face social pressures that cause them to not speak up when

dining with peers."

Dr. Stukus points out that transitioning to independence requires practice, awareness, and understanding of the factors that impact your health. He says it should start early, around 12 or 13 years old, and allergists are in a unique position to help their patients successfully navigate self-management of their food allergies and other allergic conditions.

"Effective self-management of food allergies requires an understanding of the signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction," says Dr. Stukus.

"College students with food allergies must know how and when to use epinephrine auto-injectors, how to read labels and what to communicate to food handlers. They must also have epinephrine available at all times in case of accidental ingestion leading to a severe allergic reaction."

"Parents tell us they need to educate everyone, literally everyone - professors, other [students](#), the librarian and the person putting food on your kid's plate." said Dr. Gupta, "Giving a student support from peers, staff and the college itself is critical in providing a safe and positive environment."

More information: Abstract Title: Leaving the nest: Improving food allergy management on college campuses

Provided by American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

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