

For parents of kids with food allergies, social media can bring support—and stress

May 1 2024, by Todd A. Mahr, MD, Executive Medical Director,
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Having a child with food allergies isn't easy to manage, and now new

research shows that most of these parents turn to social media for medical advice.

When they do, some of the advice is good and some is not, researchers report.

In the study, [published](#) recently in the *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*, 93% of surveyed parents of children with [food](#) allergies reported using online search engines.

In general, online searches were conducted daily or multiple times a day. Facebook was the most used social media platform. The most common reasons for using social media were to access [allergy](#) tips for school/travel, signs and symptoms of allergic reactions, and how to find food allergy support groups.

"We know that patients increasingly use online resources for information, but unfortunately they cannot always evaluate whether the information is outdated, incorrect or simply out of context," said lead study author Dr. Aikaterini Anagnostou, director of the Food Immunotherapy Program at Texas Children's Hospital and vice chair of the ACAAI Food Allergy Committee.

"The goal of our study was to characterize use of [online resources](#) by parents of children with food allergies regarding information and/or support for their child's food allergy."

The researchers surveyed 145 parents of children with a diagnosis of food allergy. Of those, 59% indicated they sought online information because of the large amount of information available, and 29% did so because they believed the information was reliable.

"The good news is that the survey participants indicated they more

frequently trust information from professional organizations, allergists' social media accounts and [advocacy groups](#)," said co-lead study author Dr. Dave Stukus, a pediatric allergist at Nationwide Children's in Ohio. "They also noted that information from other parents and celebrities was not as credible."

"The not-so-good news is that 43% of the participants didn't discuss online information with their child's allergist," he added. "And accessing food allergy information via social media was reported as a source of anxiety for 16% of those who participated."

Because food allergies can be frightening for both children and their parents, those under the care of a board-certified allergist should use their allergist as a resource to determine which sources of information are trustworthy.

The study authors stressed that online sources of information don't reflect the scientific thoroughness that is applied to evidence-based medicine. Because online reports often do not state the source of their claims, parents or others looking for information have no idea if these reports are credible or not. That said, fewer than one-third of the survey participants considered information found online as reliable.

Unfortunately, online posts are often mistaken for evidence and online influencers may be thought of as equally trustworthy to actual experts. Respondents to the survey indicated they most frequently trust information from professional sources, which is reassuring. The platforms asked about in the survey included Google, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

The authors noted throughout the study that health care organizations and medical societies are reliable sources of online information as they have done their homework and articles are reviewed and fact-checked by

medical experts. Many allergists post evidence-based information on a regular basis to [social media](#) platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Threads.

More information: Aikaterini Anagnostou et al, Social media use among parents of children with food allergies, *Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.anai.2024.03.025](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anai.2024.03.025)

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Citation: For parents of kids with food allergies, social media can bring support—and stress (2024, May 1) retrieved 15 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-05-parents-kids-food-allergies-social.html>

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