

Title: How and when to introduce eggs to avoid egg allergies

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Byline:

As egg allergy is the most common food allergy in Australian young children, evidence is emerging to investigate preventative methods for respiratory allergic diseases in childhood. This report analyses whether the timing of egg introduction into infant diets is related to egg allergy in early childhood.

Summary:

Egg allergy is the most common food allergy in Australian young children, with the most recent estimates indicating that about 10% of children are affected. The escalating rates of food allergies in general has also resulted in an increase in food anaphylaxis in children under four years of age and an increase in the number of children with egg allergies who go on to develop respiratory diseases in childhood.

As recent evidence suggests that early oral exposure of egg may be required to prevent the development of egg allergy, this report investigated whether the timing of egg introduction into infant diets was related to egg allergy in early childhood. The relationship between the age at first exposure to egg and other early childhood allergies was also assessed.

This report used an existing trial of 706 children to assess the effect of prenatal fish oil supplements on early childhood allergies to prospectively evaluate the timing of egg introduction in the diets of infants and young children. It was concluded that there was no relationship between the use of prenatal fish oil supplements and the age at which egg was introduced to the infant diet.

Based on the data determined from introducing egg in the first 12 months of life, egg exposure in the first year of life did not predict egg sensitisation (a positive result on a skin prick test to egg) at any age. There was also no significant association between egg exposure in the first 12 months and eczema with egg sensitisation at either one year of age or at one or three years of age.

The data indicates that delaying the introduction of egg to a child's diet after 12 months of age is associated with increased risk in egg allergy and eczema. Eggs should be included in the infant diet before 12 months of age and as the infant is developmentally ready. Prevention is therefore the key to reducing the burden on the individual, the family and the health care system.