

## Like Them or Not, I Must Eat Peanuts

By John Villa  
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Thirteen years ago, when I was 1, I was diagnosed with a peanut allergy. So it was always second nature for me to ask whether I could have any food that I was offered. My parents told me I would get really sick if I ate something that contained peanuts, so every time I came across a food we didn't have in our house, I would have to ask if it was safe to eat.

I remember going to birthday parties where I couldn't eat the birthday cake because whoever was hosting the party might have just bought the cake at the grocery and they wouldn't have known what was in it. My parents would send me with my own cake or brownies.

Because it's possible for kids to outgrow allergies, every few years my parents would take me to Johns Hopkins Medical Center, where I would be tested to see if I had outgrown mine. All I really remember about the test was that I would sit in a room and eat something that had peanuts in it while doctors watched me. If I showed any signs of a severe reaction, they were ready to treat me.

This was true up until I was 8. That year, when I went to do the usual test, they kept me longer than usual. Then they started giving me more and more peanut butter M&Ms. I felt fine. They asked me new questions this time, like "How do you feel?" and "Are you okay?" I told them "I'm fine" and said I liked the M&Ms.

It had happened -- I'd outgrown my allergy. On our way home, my mom and I stopped at a deli to get a salami sandwich. The man at the counter offered me a cookie that had broken and couldn't be sold. I looked at my mom and said, "Can I have it?" Mom looked at me and said, "You can have anything you want."

The weird thing is, before I'd left the hospital, a doctor *had* warned me that I had to eat peanuts regularly in order to keep the allergy from coming back. I thought to myself, that's no big deal. I can eat a few peanuts. I'll be eating them every day anyway.

But when I tried peanut butter M&Ms again, they tasted terrible. And eating them was scary because for my whole life I had been told to stay away from peanuts.

It has been six years since then, and I guess I have not eaten peanuts as much as I should. A few weeks ago, I ate some peanut butter chocolate chip cookies and it felt funny, like my throat was itching. The doctor said I needed a blood test because the allergy could have come back. That blood test came back negative, but I have learned I have got to eat peanuts to keep my allergy away.

Even if I don't like them.

*John Villa lives with his family in Bethesda.*

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