

Research News *(continued from cover)*

learns to tolerate the offender. For people with food allergies, this exposure can result in allergic reactions to the treatment itself. Similarly, even though the food challenge is the most accurate diagnostic test for food allergies, its use is limited because it requires patients to consume increasing amounts of suspect foods, possibly triggering a reaction.

Recombinant proteins may help solve these medical dilemmas. Researchers can use genetic engineering techniques to alter the shellfish proteins, creating modified allergens whose ability to bind to IgE is drastically reduced. These proteins could then be used for a safe vaccine (“allergy shots”). Also, well-defined and engineered shellfish proteins may allow for more accurate diagnostic tests.

FAI is deeply grateful to Charles, Nancy, Sam, and Alison Clarvit, whose generous support has made this important study possible.

Expanding Clinical Activities

FAI is committed to improving diagnosis and treatment by fostering the development of centers of excellence. We currently provide a significant grant to the Roslyn and Elliot Jaffe Food Allergy Institute at Mount Sinai Medical Center. **This longstanding commitment has enabled the Institute to see twice as many patients as would otherwise be possible**, and to conduct a comprehensive clinical program that also has helped facilitate vital research.

Over the past 10 years, more than 12,000 patients have been treated at this internationally known institute. This year, under the leadership of Hugh A. Sampson, M.D., and thanks to the Jaffe family and other supporters, the Institute is establishing a state-of-the-art clinic, which will employ an allergist/immunologist, a gastroenterologist, a nutritionist, and a feeding disorders specialist. Learn more at www.mssm.edu/jaffe_food_allergy/.

FAI funding also helped the University of Michigan Health System—listed as one of America’s best hospitals in *U.S. News and World Report’s* 2007 survey—to create an innovative Food Allergy Clinic in Ann Arbor. This regional center, which opened in

2007, features a unique design that controls airflow from room to room, ensuring that airborne food challenges are conducted safely. Visit www.med.umich.edu for more information.

In the News: “Allergy-Free” Peanuts?

The media have given considerable attention to an announcement that researchers at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University have developed “a simple process to make allergen-free peanuts” without affecting their taste or texture.

Unfortunately, the media reports may be premature and possibly inaccurate, according to medical experts. “We are cautious because the claims are being made without peer-reviewed studies,” says Scott Sicherer, M.D., associate professor of pediatrics at Mount Sinai School of Medicine and a clinician/researcher at the Jaffe Food Allergy Institute.

Reports indicate that a fermentation process on peanut flour reduced peanut allergen binding to IgE by 60-70% in a lab test. “If the reports are correct, I would still be concerned that this reduction may not be protective enough against allergic reactions,” Dr. Sicherer says. “Humans would need to be tested to truly determine safety.”

Even if the process works on peanut flour, Dr. Sicherer adds, it “may not work on other peanut products, such as peanut butter.” He points out that fermented soy beans produce a soy sauce that is far less allergenic than whole soybeans. “However, soy sauce is clearly no longer similar in texture or taste to soybeans.”

While FAI is excited about the prospect of a process to make peanuts non-allergenic, we do not have specifics about the studies in process. We hope to see a scientific article that will clarify the details and implications.

The bottom line: We’ll have to wait and see whether allergy-free PB&J sandwiches really are in our future. FAI will be sure to keep you informed of any new developments.○

Coping with Food Allergies: It’s In the Cards!

These handy resources make it easier to learn and live with food allergies.

“Beyond a Peanut” Interactive Flashcards

Publisher: MindFlight LLC
List Price: \$13.99
www.beyondapeanut.com



These 36 colorful, ring-bound flashcards have pictures on the front and food allergy facts on the back. Designed by a parent of two food-allergic children, they provide a “snapshot to help people learn about cross-contamination, the importance of reading every label, the use of epinephrine,” and more. The cards are color-coded to indicate which should be used to help educate children with peanut and tree nut allergies, and which are designed to increase adults’ understanding.

Holding up a card with a picture of a food and asking “Is this safe?” teaches kids what’s OK, what’s not, and what questions to ask if they’re not sure. Other cards provide a quick and easy way to show adults how to protect children in situations that may not be readily apparent to people who are unfamiliar with food allergies: at ballparks, for example (“Bring a plastic bag, and ask people near you to please place their peanut shells in the bag”) or when playing with pets (“Some pet owners place animal vitamins or medications in peanut butter to help their pet swallow the drug. Always make sure you ask the pet owner before playing with any animal”).

“Beyond a Peanut” flashcards were developed, in part, with a grant from FAI. ○

Don’t Leave Home Without Them!

FAI’s Web site offers lots of great resources to help you live with food allergies at home and abroad—so be sure to pay us a visit at www.faiusa.org. Planning a business trip or vacation overseas? Don’t leave home without your Food Allergy Restaurant Card and Emergency Medical Plan. You’ll find them in multiple languages in our Downloads section. Whether your travels take you to a Roman trattoria or a Tokyo boardroom, we’ve got you covered!