

Preparing Others to Care for Children with Food Allergies



FARE
Food Allergy Research & Education

Working with Schools

Education, planning and cooperation are the keys to managing food allergies at school. Follow these steps to help children with food allergies stay safe and included at school:

1. Educate Yourself

Before planning for your child's care at school, you need to learn everything you can about your child's food allergies, the policies at your child's school and what accommodations you are seeking.

- **Every parent should know and be able to explain:**
 - The foods their child must avoid.
 - The signs of an allergic reaction.
 - The role of epinephrine in treatment.
 - The right way to use an epinephrine auto-injector.
- **Find out as much as you can about your school's approach to managing food allergies.** Many schools have already adopted food allergy management strategies. A good starting point is a local food allergy support group, where you can connect with parents whose children attend schools in your area. You can find a local support group on FARE's website at foodallergy.org/supportgroups.
- **Learn what practices and accommodations are recommended.** In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published "Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs." These national guidelines and other information, including links to state guidelines, can be found on FARE's website.

2. Create a Plan that Keeps Your Child Safe and Included

In addition to a Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan, FARE recommends that parents and schools create an individualized written food allergy management plan. One type of plan is called a 504 Plan.

A 504 Plan (named for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) is a plan that outlines the accommodations, aids or services that a student with a disability needs in order to use, and fully participate in, a free and appropriate public education. Children whose food allergy may result in severe, life-threatening reactions (in the opinion of the child's doctor) meet the definition of disability under Section 504.

504 Plans are a legal right in schools that receive federal funding. This includes many private schools. Students who go to private schools that do not take federal monies are covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act and can work with their schools to set up similar plans. Religious schools may be exempt from Section 504, but state laws may apply. Each school should have a 504 Coordinator who can help.

Talking to Caregivers

Managing food allergies is a team effort, and babysitters, extended family members and other caregivers are often important members of that team. Educating caregivers and planning ahead will help ensure that your child is safe and included while you are gone. Here are some important steps you can take to prepare caregivers:

- **Explain the allergy, which foods to avoid, and the safety precautions you follow at home.** Be sure to provide enough time for the caregiver to absorb the information. You may want to set up a meeting in the days or week prior to when they will be caring for your child to ensure you have enough time to review everything and they have enough time to ask questions.
- **Carefully explain to the caregiver the symptoms of a food allergy reaction and what to do if a reaction occurs.** Refer them to the food allergy reaction symptoms as described in your Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan (FAAACP).
- **Show the babysitter how to use an epinephrine auto-injector, and make sure the sitter is comfortable using it.** Using expired pens or trainers, let the sitter practice on an orange to get a feel for it. Instructional videos for a variety of epinephrine auto-injectors can be found on the FARE website at foodallergy.org/epinephrine.
- **Tell the caregiver to act first and call you later.** Let the caregiver know that the most important thing they need to do in case of a severe reaction is to inject epinephrine and call 911. Let them know that, when in doubt, they should choose to use epinephrine and that you will not be upset at their decision.
- **Make it easy to reach you.** Leave your cell phone number with the caregiver, as well as the number of at least one other person in case you are away from the phone.
- **Explain the dangers of cross-contact and how to avoid it.** Have them read the How to Avoid Cross-Contact sheet.
- **Teach the caregiver how to read labels.** Make a copy of the Tips for Avoiding Your Allergen sheet and keep it in the kitchen or in another easily accessible location. Practice reading a few labels with the caregiver.
- **Leave a tray of safe foods that they can give your child while you are out.**
- **Have the caregiver arrive after your child has eaten and is ready for bed.** This strategy is probably the least stressful until you feel comfortable leaving your child with someone else.
- **Put it all in writing.** Keep all important information and instructions together in an easily accessible place, such as a brightly colored binder in the kitchen, and make sure to update it as needed.

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