

Early Introduction of Peanuts Prevents Allergies



peanuts (Aney, Wikimedia Commons)

While many people believe that peanut allergies are confined to Western countries, this growing problem has actually spread to Africa and Asia. The prevalence of peanut allergies in North America and European countries has doubled in the past 10 years, and a surprising amount of people are being diagnosed with peanut allergies in Africa and Asia. Peanut allergy studies have remained scarce outside of Western countries since this problem has only recently surfaced in Africa and Asia. This further increases the need for peanut allergy studies to help us understand and prevent this growing problem.

In a study conducted by Du Toit *et al.*, researchers compared different peanut consumption strategies to prevent the

development of peanut allergies in infants. Infants who are at high risk of developing peanut allergies usually have another pre-existing condition such as eczema or egg allergy. 640 of these high risk infants were instructed to either avoid or consume peanuts until they reached 60 months of age. These infants were also tested for peanut sensitivity with a skin-prick test at the beginning of the study.

At the end of the study, the prevalence of peanut allergy for infants who initially tested negative for sensitivity was 13.7% in the avoidance group and 1.9% in the consumption group. In the other group that initially tested positive for sensitivity, the prevalence of peanut allergy was 35.3% in the avoidance group and 10.6% in the consumption group. In general, the infants who avoided peanuts had higher levels of peanut-specific IgE antibodies.

This study showed that early introduction of peanuts significantly decreases the risk of developing peanut allergies in high risk infants. This could help explain the difference in peanut allergy prevalence between Western and non-Western countries. Since peanuts are a less common ingredient in Western cuisine, infants may be exposed to peanuts at a later age. Ironically, the increase in peanut-free products sold in Western countries may actually delay the introduction of peanuts to infant diets, leading to increased incidents of peanut allergy. This problem is further exacerbated due to the fact that many Western schools and daycares enact a peanut-free policy to protect children with peanut allergies.

Journal Article: [Du Toit et al., 2015. Randomized Trial of Peanut Consumption in Infants at Risk for Peanut Allergy. *New England Journal of Medicine*](#)

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