

Do Asian Children Have Less Peanut Allergy?

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Some of us, allergists in Asian at times aren't very impressed why peanut allergy draws so much attention and is regarded as the prototype of food allergy in Western countries. Population prevalence studies conducted in highly developed Asian cosmopolitan cities showed the peanut allergy is perhaps ~0.1-0.3% which is almost 10-fold less than many English-speaking nations [1-4]. The mortality due to peanut allergy is almost unheard of in the last 15 years allergy practice in Hong Kong. While the world allergy community is celebrating the breakthrough in high risk infant prevention by the game-changer studies: Learning Early About Peanut Allergy (LEAP) and LEAP-ON [5-7] and shifting the pendulum from delayed to early introduction of allergenic food at 4-11month of age, as stipulated in international infant feeding guidelines. Amidst all the enthusiasms, the latest Growing Up in Singapore Towards Healthy Outcomes (GUSTO) study found all food allergy rates including PA in Singapore are low despite delayed introduction of allergenic foods [4]. That raised a salient counter argument that early introduction of allergenic foods may not be the "gold standard" or even necessary in populations in which overall food allergy prevalence is low. Therefore, infant feeding recommendations should be carefully tailored to Asian populations.

Intriguingly, Asian infants born in Australia are three times more likely to develop nut allergy than non-Asian infants, and rates of challenge-proven food allergy in infants have been found to be unexpectedly high in metropolitan Melbourne. Such high peanut allergy prevalence among infants of Asian-born parents appears to have occurred in a single generation and was not present among infants with parents migrating from other countries, suggesting gene-environment interactions are important [8-9]. What are the protective factors of Asian children? Why migrant children have lost such protection? Would a reverse migration from West to East regain the protection? These are interesting research questions to be elucidated.

If you ask me again, do Asian children have less peanut allergy? My answer is perhaps yes and no. It depends...

Reference

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