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CAPITAL ALLERGY & RESPIRATORY DISEASE CENTER  
A MEDICAL CORPORATION

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE ORAL FOOD CHALLENGE**

### **What is an Oral Food Challenge (OFC)?**

While Blood tests and skin test are the current primary tool for diagnosing a food allergy, unfortunately they do not tell us the whole picture and sometimes an allergist is unable to arrive at a definitive diagnosis. In this case, you may be asked to undergo an oral food challenge (OFC). An OFC is considered the “Golden Standard” test for food allergies; however, because of the risk of anaphylaxis it often is avoided. An OFC will tell us how sensitive you/ your child is to a particular allergen and help us determine how severe you/ your child’s actual allergy is.

Because of the risk that OFCs should only be performed by an experienced allergist at a medical facility where the appropriate medications and equipment are available. Extensive studies have shown that OFCs are very safe when administered in this way, and the medical community has developed comprehensive guidelines and standards for these tests. Indeed, many thousands of OFCs have been performed worldwide with an excellent safety record.

In some cases, OFCs are administered to people who have already been diagnosed. An allergist may order the test to find out if a patient has outgrown a food allergy. In clinical trials, OFCs help researchers learn how well participants are responding to the treatment under study.

### **Who will be taking care of me/my child during the OFC?**

We have a team of medical professionals here at Capital Allergy & Respiratory Disease Center that consists of Physicians, Physician Assistants, Nurse Practitioners, Registered Nurses, Medical Assistants and Administrative/ Support Staff that are readily available to assist you when you are here in our clinic. We all work together to take care of you/your child during the OFC.

### **What should I expect to occur during the visit?**

We will start with a tiny amount of the food that your child is reportedly allergic to masked in another food and gradually increase the dose. We suggest mixing the food with apple sauce, pudding, yogurt, or ice cream to help mask the taste. You are welcome to bring in a food from home that you think you/your child would like to mix the allergen in. The only requirement is that the mixing vehicle cannot be hot. Mashed potatoes and oatmeal are always a great food to mask other foods in.

Sometimes people have anxiety regarding the OFC because they may have been told their whole life that they should avoid the food and now we are “challenging” them with the very same food. This is completely normal and natural.

Often times anxiety of the offending allergen and/ or the OFC itself can cause someone to experience subjective symptoms (such as itchy skin or abdominal pain) and because we have to

determine if the reaction is allergic in nature, and not from anxiety, we need what we call an objective or observable symptom. What this means during the challenge is that we have been able to see a change in their physical exam (such as a hive, red eyes, runny nose, coughing, vomiting or wheezing) in order to stop dosing.

### **What symptoms could I or my child have during an OFC?**

Some of the most common mild to moderate symptoms are:

- Abdominal pain
- Vomiting
- Urticaria (hives)
- Skin rashes
- Angioedema (facial swelling)
- Generalized itching
- Coughing
- Sneezing

Some of the more severe reactions are:

- Shortness of breath or wheezing
- Repetitive coughing or changes in voice
- Throat tightness or significant oral swelling
- Widespread urticaria or redness
- Repetitive vomiting
- Drop in blood pressure
- Change in color (pale) or Loss of consciousness

Most patients will experience mild or moderate symptoms during an OFC and the symptoms generally resolved fairly quickly with antihistamines. The more severe symptoms are less common, but can still occur during an OFC.

### **What happens once there is an observable reaction?**

Once an observable reaction is seen, we still stop dosing and give the appropriate medications to stop the reaction. These medications will range from antihistamines such as Benadryl and Zyrtec to Epinephrine. The medications to be given will be at the discretion of the clinician based on you/your child's symptoms. We ask for your full compliance in allowing us to give medications to you/your child to stop the allergic reaction. On a rare occasion, an IV may need to be placed during the OFC. At the end of the challenge, we will monitor your child for 1-2 hours after the last dose or until symptoms resolve to ensure full recovery.

### **How I do prepare for my child for the visit?**

Talk to your child and let them know the reasons why we are performing the OFC and that they will be in a safe and protected environment. Let them know the reason why we are performing the OFC and the potential reactions that may occur.

It is important that you/ your child is as honest as possible with the clinician and staff and let us know exactly how they feel throughout the challenge. We understand that this is a scary thing to do and will be there for you to help answer questions and assist you in any way that we can.

It is important to understand that unless you are advised by your provider, that you NEVER eat any food that you are allergic to outside of our care.

**What medications should I/ my child avoid before an OFC?**

Antihistamine medications can mask symptoms of an allergic reaction. Since the purpose of the DBPCFC is to confirm that you/your child has an allergic reaction to a certain food, we need antihistamines to be discontinued prior to the DBPCFC. Discontinue antihistamines such as Benadryl or Diphenhydramine for 72 hours prior to the appointment, and Cetirizine/Zyrtec, Allertec/WalZyr, Fexofenadine/Allegra, Xyzal, Loratidine/Claritin or Clarinex for 5 days prior to the OFC.

Albuterol or Xopenex should also not be given within 12 hours of the OFC unless your child needs it for their asthma and/or you have been advised to continue using Albuterol or Xopenex from your provider. If, however, your child needs Albuterol or Xopenex prior to the OFC, please contact us to determine if we may need to reschedule the appointment.

**How long is the visit?**

You should plan on approximately 4-6 hours for each visit.

**Where should I arrive for my appointment?**

Capital Allergy & Respiratory Disease Center, 5609 J Street, Suite C, Sacramento CA 95819.

**What should I bring to the visit?**

Make sure that you and your child have plenty of entertainment to last the entire duration of the visit. We suggest bringing favorite books or movies, homework, a computer and/or DVD player, and/or games for the visit. You should bring entertainment or work for yourself too! Free Wi-Fi is available! Just ask one of the staff members for the login and password if you need it.

For OFC appointments please make sure your child eats a light breakfast or lunch that includes carbohydrates before the appointment. Also, please bring allergen –free non-perishable, snacks, and drinks for you and your child. You will need to stay with your child for the entire visit so please make arrangements to do so.

**What if my/ my child's is ill, experiencing seasonal allergy symptoms or an asthma flare?**

We will not perform an OFC when you/ your child is sick in any way, or their asthma is not well-controlled because it can increase the severity of an allergic reaction. If you/ your child becomes ill prior to the OFC, please contact our office and we would be happy to reschedule the appointment.

**Will I need another blood draw or skin test?**

No but we do ask that you/ your child is well hydrated prior to the appointment.

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