

WELCOMING GIRLS WITH **Food Allergies** INTO YOUR TROOP

A food allergy is an unusual response to a food caused by the body's immune system. Allergic reactions to food can sometimes cause serious illness and even death. Tree nuts and peanuts are the leading causes of dangerous allergic reactions called anaphylaxis-this is an acute allergic reaction to an antigen (cause, ex. bee sting, eating an allergen such as a peanut product) to which the body has become hypersensitive. However, there are many foods which people can be allergic to and every person is different in what their allergies are and how sensitive they are to certain products. For example, one person may be allergic to strawberries and eating them causes a rash on their face that will go away without medical attention after a short period of time; but another person allergic to strawberries may break out in itchy hives all over their body and require medical attention to resolve this reaction. Every person is unique in what their allergic to and their reactions to their allergens. This includes environmental allergies as well as food allergies.

When someone with a food allergy eats a product their allergic to (ex. berries or nuts), their immune system launches an attack by releasing histamine and other powerful substances which causes symptoms that becomes an "allergic reaction."

Symptoms of an allergic reaction can be rashes, hives, cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, lightheadedness, increased heart rate, difficulty breathing or asthmatic inflammation, excess mucus production, sneezing, coughing, congestion in the nasal or airway passages, swelling of the lips, tongue, or throat, and watery eyes.

People with food allergies may manage their allergies in different ways. There is medication they may take orally or via injection. They may simply avoid foods that cause allergic reactions. Or if they have an anaphylaxis allergic reaction to something they may carry an EpiPen with them. If their food allergies cause asthmatic reactions they may also have asthma medication, a rescue inhaler, or regulatory inhaler as well.

Some suggestions and strategies for preparing for and including girls with food allergies in your troop:

1. Consult with the girl's parent/guardian beforehand about any medication or medical equipment that may be present with the girl or adult during meetings-be clear in how and when to administer the medication or treatment and be sure it's being stored in a safe location away from general accessibility of the girls (they may have an "Asthma Action Plan" or "Allergy Action Plan" to consult).
2. If a girl has a rescue inhaler or EpiPen, make sure that it is safely kept away from the other girls, but also is easily accessible by the responsible adult in the event of an asthma attack or anaphylaxis allergic reaction-the rescue inhaler and/or EpiPen should be with the responsible adult and present with the asthmatic and/or allergic girl at all times.
3. Ask the parent/guardian to provide you with ideas and instructions about what food to serve and how to prepare it – some allergies are more sensitive than others and may require extremely cautious food handling or even separate meal/snack times.
4. If there is a severe, anaphylaxis, allergy present, ask the parent/guardian if it is okay to share with all the other parents and

girls in the troop so that they may avoid bringing the allergen into contact with the girl (ex. peanuts).

5. Remind the other girls in the troop to not share food with their food-allergic friend.
6. Everyone should wash their hands before and after eating to help prevent traces of an allergen from being passed on.
7. If there is any symptom of an allergic reaction, address the situation: a) consult for help and directions from the parent/guardian; b) administer medication if appropriate and permission has been given; c) remove the allergen from

the situation; d) call for EMS if necessary.

8. Unless the girl and her parent/guardian prefer confidentiality within the troop, have the girl share about her differing abilities and special needs with the troop safely and allow the other girls to ask questions in a sensitive and caring manner to better understanding and allow everyone to work together as a troop to help everyone's needs be met.
9. Always consult with the parent/guardian beforehand to be sure you're providing for the girl's needs to the best of your ability – they will know the best methods and strategies to help their child.

Special thanks to Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capitol and The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network.

For more help and information please visit Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America <<http://www.aafa.org/page/allergic-asthma.aspx>> and Food Allergy Research and Education <<http://www.foodallergy.org>>

If you have other questions or concerns you may contact the GSFA committee via email at gsfa@gsctx.org or GSCTX at customercare@gsctx.org or via phone at 1-800-733-0011.

This document is not intended to replace or supersede any doctor's instructions nor should it in any way be taken as medical advice or directions. This resource is a suggestion for GSCTX volunteers to use while welcoming girls to their troops with special needs and is for informational and educational purposes only. Please follow a parent/guardian's instructions in the medical care of their child and make sure you always have the appropriate medical and troop permission forms completed and available for emergency medical services (EMS) personnel.

Some food preparation suggestions for some more common allergies:

- For milk-free (lactose-free) baking: substitute water, fruit juices, rice milk, or soy milk
- For egg-free baking: substitute:
 - 1 tsp. baking powder, 1 T. liquid, 1 T. vinegar
 - 1 tsp. yeast dissolved in 1/4 cup warm water
 - 1 T. apricot puree
 - 1 1/2 T. water, 1 1/2 T. oil, 1 tsp. baking powder
 - 1 packet gelatin, 2 T. warm water (do not mix until ready to use)
- For wheat-free baking/thickening: for each 1 T. wheat flour, substitute:
 - 1 1/2 tsp. cornstarch
 - 1 T. white or brown rice flour
 - 1 1/2 tsp. potato starch
 - 2 tsp. quick-cooking tapioca
 - 1 1/2 tsp. arrowroot starch
 - 1 1/2 tsp. sweet rice flour
- Use sunflower seed butter in place of peanut butter or almond butter.
- Use soy, almond, coconut, or lactose-free dairy supplements.
- Gluten-free substitutes are commonly available in most stores and restaurants now, or simply removing any gluten-bearing items will suffice.