Parent-reported Prevalence of Food Allergies: Another Number for Concern
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We hear more and more about food allergies from our patients, from schools, and from communities. Is the prevalence of this health problem really trending upward? Like most health problems, capturing the actual prevalence can be difficult due to lack of a uniform way food allergies are diagnosed and tracked. An indirect way to do this would be to ask parents of children using a valid survey tool. Such is the case by Gupta et al. (10.1542/peds.2018-1235) who administered a national survey in 2015-16 to caregivers for 38,408 children. The results indicate an estimated prevalence of 7.6%, with peanut (2.2%), milk (1.9%), shellfish (1.3%) and tree nut allergy (1.2%) leading the list. Of interest is that the authors removed 4% of families from the prevalence calculation who claimed food allergy but did not provide a history consistent with food allergy. Most concerning is that 19% of families who had a child with a food allergy reported at least one food allergy visit to the emergency department in the year prior to completing the survey and only 40.75% of those who self-reported their child having a food allergy had a current epinephrine auto-injector prescription. The authors provide a host of other demographic and descriptive data and provide insight in their discussion of their findings as to what might be responsible for this high prevalence of food allergy in children. Hopefully after this description, you are itching to learn more, which can then be shared with families of children who are food-allergic-so link to this study which is great food (just not allergic food) for thought.

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