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Success of UK peanut research offers hope BUT BEWARE: There is much to be done before Australia or even the UK is able to offer peanut desensitisation to the many thousands diagnosed with peanut allergy.

Four children with peanut allergy have taken part in the UK's first successful pilot peanut desensitisation programme, at Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge.

Four children aged 9 -13 years with serious peanut allergy underwent oral desensitisation (immunotherapy) in an attempt to switch off their allergy. The four children started with a miniscule five-milligram serving of peanut flour, with doctors slowly increasing the dose over six months until their bodies were able to tolerate at least 800 milligrams, equivalent to five whole peanuts. While this pilot trial was successful, it was not without its problems, with one of the four children having anaphylaxis during the early phase.

Dr Andy Clark, who led the now published research, says: "It's not a permanent cure, but as long as they go on taking a daily dose they should maintain their tolerance."

Maria Said, President of Anaphylaxis Australia today made this comment:

"We welcome this exciting development in the search for a cure for peanut allergy BUT we need also bear in mind that there are few overnight 'medical breakthroughs', but rather lots of promising studies, some blind alleys and at times, setbacks. We should be cautiously optimistic that work in the UK will continue in order to ensure that the findings might eventually be used to the advantage of people living with peanut and other food allergy. But we also need to be realistic; there are many logistic and safety barriers that need to be overcome before these techniques become mainstream therapy. And we still do not have enough information on why food allergy develops in some children and not others, so that we can try to prevent it in the first place", said Maria Said.

Anaphylaxis Australia stresses that food immunotherapy is a potentially risky procedure and one that can only be carried out in a hospital or research setting with trained health professionals present, as the risk of anaphylaxis is real.

Dr Raymond Mullins, President of the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA) has commented:

"This is an important study which demonstrates proof of concept that it is possible to induce tolerance in food allergic children. The study joins the ranks of similar studies undertaken in Europe and the United States in the last couple of years (and trials that have recently commenced in Australia), involving small numbers of children so far. These studies are important, but these techniques are not yet ready to translate into routine outpatient practice, since side-effects (including anaphylaxis) are not uncommon during the buildup phase."

"The logistics surrounding hospital-based introduction of food allergen (done under close medical supervision at this time for safety reasons) are challenges that cannot be currently met by our current health system, which struggles to keep pace with the demand to assess the increasing numbers of new children presenting with food allergy on a daily basis."

"Long term, we need to *invest, identify and intervene*," Mullins stated. "We call on our health care planners to *invest* heavily into epidemiological research to identify the factors that have led to this food allergy epidemic in the last decade. We need to *identify* causative factors to design preventative strategies to stem the ongoing increase, and we need to encourage *intervention studies* to treat established disease". Allergic disease is a major public health issue in Australia, and one that government has ignored for too long. A failure to act now will give rise to an "allergy generation" who will pay the price for years to come."

FOOD ALLERGY FAST FACTS

- 5% of Australian children will develop food allergy by school age.
- 1% of Australian adults currently have food allergy
- There is evidence that food allergy has increased in Australia and other countries in the last decade.
- Peanut allergy is estimated to affect 2-3% of children by school age.
- In 80% of children with peanut allergy, it remains a lifelong problem.

ANAPHYLAXIS AUSTRALIA INC

Anaphylaxis Australia Inc is a non-profit Australian charity which was formed in 1993. AAI's mission is to increase awareness of anaphylaxis through education, research and support. The organisation works with health and teaching professionals, members of the food industry and all who are touched by life-threatening allergy so that, together, we can improve the quality of life of allergic Australians nationally. For more information visit the AAI website: www.allergyfacts.org.au or call 1300 728 000.

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