

This is Nuts!

By Reg P. Wydeven
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This year our kids entered new schools: our daughter is in high school while our son started middle school. Because of our son's food allergies, we always get a little nervous when he starts at a new school. Until he gets into a comfort zone in the lunch room and the staff is aware of his allergies, we always feel a little uneasy.

Thanks to a product recently reviewed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, however, new parents hopefully won't have the same worries we have.

Last month, the FDA allowed Hello Peanut to tout its usefulness in preventing peanut allergies. The product is designed to facilitate early peanut introduction to hopefully help children develop a tolerance to the legume and stave off a life-threatening allergy.

The \$25 system consists of eight small packets of peanut powder that are labeled to correspond with when you should introduce them to your child ("Day 1," "Day 2," etc.). Each day the dosage of peanut powder increases. Hello Peanut also has a \$20 maintenance kit with another eight packets of peanut powder that are intended to be sprinkled on your child's food three times a week to sustain the tolerance.

Hello Peanut informs consumers that "For most infants with severe eczema and/or egg allergy who are already eating solid foods, introducing foods containing ground peanuts between 4 and 10 months of age and continuing consumption may reduce the risk of developing peanut allergy by 5 years of age." The company advises parents, though, to "check with your infant's healthcare provider before feeding foods containing ground peanuts."

Despite Hello Peanut's assertion that their product is "intended for the general population without a history of food allergies or eczema," the FDA pointed out that evidence supporting their claims was limited to one study. However, the study in question involved 600 infants who were determined to be at a high risk of a peanut allergy, meaning the babies already had eczema or an egg allergy, so they were not taken from the "general population."

While most products are 'authorized' by the FDA, Hello Peanut at this point is only considered to be FDA-qualified. Basically, this means that while there is evidence to support the company's claims, Hello Peanut has not been subjected to the rigorous testing needed to conclusively prove the claims are accurate.

The FDA is also quick to point out that Hello Peanut isn't intended to cure existing peanut allergies, like my son's. Rather it is designed to prevent the development of a peanut allergy in babies.

Medical experts have weighed in and many believe the system may very well succeed in staving off peanut allergies. Some of these experts also stated that there is nothing therapeutic about Hello Peanut's peanut powder – peanut powder is peanut powder. Grinding up your own peanuts will have the same results, however, this should always be done only after consulting with your child's pediatrician or allergist.

So if I would have just let my kid lick the ground in the stands at baseball games, he may not have developed a peanut allergy.

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