

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE... ⬇

# TO HAVE A CHILD WITH SEVERE FOOD ALLERGIES

Chloe Wood, 23, from Norwich, is mum to Theo, aged three, whose allergies have landed him in A&E more than once

“Getting people to understand Theo’s allergies is my biggest challenge. Even my family didn’t realise how serious Theo’s situation was until they saw him in anaphylaxis – which first happened when he was six months, and has happened eight more times since. Until you see it, you don’t realise what food can do to you.

Theo was massively unwell from the minute he was born; he didn’t put on weight, he projectile vomited after every feed, he had severe eczema, and he was covered head to toe in hives.

First we were told it was acid reflux, then colic. Next we were told he was lactose intolerant, and he was put on lactose-free milk. But it still contains dairy protein, which he’s allergic to, so that made him horrendously poorly. It wasn’t until he saw a dietician that he got the dairy allergy diagnosis. He was put on an amino acid-based formula called Neocate LCP and overnight he was like a different baby. He stopped having

explosive bowel movements, projectile vomiting and his eczema calmed, but it had taken six months to get there.

Having seen how ill he was, doctors felt that after weaning him it could get a lot worse, so we were given EpiPens (epinephrine injection pens you use to treat emergency anaphylaxis) as a precaution. At six months he picked up a crumb from a biscuit that his sister had dropped – and he went into anaphylaxis. He blew up like a raspberry and couldn’t breathe. Terrified, I injected him and called 999. Within two minutes he was a more normal colour, but drowsy. By the time he got to hospital it was as if nothing had happened – he was flirting with the nurses! They monitored him for six hours, then we came home. (I’ve subsequently had to do the same thing eight times because, at three, he now has 12 allergies.)

Weaning Theo was so hard, as he was reacting to everything, from sweet potatoes to carrots. A lot of things he’d be fine with one day, but

For Chloe, it’s a constant battle to find safe foods for Theo





## → CHILD ALLERGIES: THE STATS

- In Europe and the USA, **six to eight per cent** of children up to the age of three have food allergies.
- Children are **most commonly allergic to cow's milk, hen's eggs, peanuts and other nuts**, but they often outgrow them.
- A family history of asthma, hay fever or eczema raises risk; **33 to 81 per cent of children with**

**eczema have IgE food allergy** (where symptoms are severe).

- UK hospital admissions for children with food allergies are **up 700 per cent** since 1990.
- Anaphylaxis is due to the immune system **overreacting to a harmless substance** and releasing chemicals, like histamine, to combat the mistaken threat.

react to the next. He was on almond milk for a long time and then a few months ago, he suddenly reacted severely to it. He's anaphylactic to dairy, almonds and kiwis – while his allergies to soya, wheat, gluten, cod, and orange give him a rash, severe diarrhoea, or make him throw up. I write everything down in a huge folder for the dietician, who we now see regularly along with an allergist and a gastroenterologist. We also see a child psychologist, as Theo associates food with pain, so he's scared that eating could make him ill. Happily, we haven't had any severe allergies in six months.

**A**t first I used to worry what on earth I could feed him that was safe. But now I just follow the list. My daughter, Mia, five, is fantastic. She'll avoid chocolate or milkshakes rather than put Theo at risk.

I cook everything from scratch, loads of veg, it's very healthy. I read every label – I've found milk in a jar of pickled onions before and it can even be in washing up liquid! He's also allergic to grass, pollen, penicillin, UV and house dust mites.

My mum and my nan know exactly what he can and can't have. We bring food wherever we go. We've managed to eat at Zizzi's and at a gluten-free cafe. We can't eat out on a whim – I call ahead to explain, but I don't want him to feel isolated so I like to take him out.

Now I take each day as it comes, I'm lucky, though, I've got great friends and family, Mia couldn't be a kinder sister, and Theo is still my gorgeous, cheeky boy. **6**



*For advice, go to [allergyuk.org](http://allergyuk.org). Chloe blogs at [theadventuresofanallergymummy.co.uk](http://theadventuresofanallergymummy.co.uk).*