ORAL FOOD CHALLENGE
INFORMATION SHEET

What is an Oral Food Challenge?
If allergy test results and medical history do not show for certain whether or not your child has (still has) a food allergy to a specific food, we recommend that your child have an oral food challenge test.

The oral food challenge involves eating a serving of the allergic food in a slow, graded fashion under medical supervision. The food challenge procedure is the most accurate test to determine whether a food needs to be avoided or will no longer need to be avoided.

The food challenge is undertaken when your child is in generally good health and can discontinue antihistamine for a brief period (usually 3 days) before the test.

What will happen during the Oral Food Challenge?
During the food challenge, your child will be given very small amounts of the specific food being tested. If tolerated, increasing amounts of the challenge food will be given with close observation at each stage.

Your child will be observed for symptoms such as itching, rash, abdominal pain, or difficulty breathing. If any symptoms develop, your child will be treated immediately. In most cases, this will involve the use of diphenhydramine and/or epinephrine to prevent any allergic reactions from getting worse. In studies of food challenges, many children develop mild symptoms during a food challenge that require these treatments. Very rarely, other treatments are needed for more serious reactions.

In some cases, your doctor may decide to place an IV in your child’s arm before the challenge starts. This would be used to give medicine if needed.

In some cases, the food challenge is performed by masking the food to hide the taste, and using food that looks/tastes the same but does not contain the food being tested. This is called a placebo. These procedures reduce the possibility that we would misjudge a reaction to the food that could occur from fear or distaste of the new food.

What are the risks or discomforts of an Oral Food Challenge?
The discomforts associated with the food challenge are generally no more than those encountered when eating the food. Symptoms usually are short-lived (less than 2 hours). Symptoms may include an itchy skin rash, nausea, abdominal discomfort, vomiting, diarrhea, stuffy “runny” nose, sneezing, or wheezing.

The major risks involved include severe breathing difficulties and rarely a drop in blood pressure. While a severe outcome such as death is theoretically possible, this has not occurred from medically supervised oral food challenges. The risk of a reaction is reduced by starting the challenge with very small amounts of food, administering the food over a prolonged time period and stopping the challenge at the first sign of a reaction, and by not giving any food suspected to cause a major reaction.

Medications, personnel and equipment will be immediately available to treat allergic reaction should they occur.
Other considerations
It is not uncommon for a young child to become stubborn and refuse to ingest the challenge food. Allowing the use of well-cleansed utensils and dinnerware that are familiar to the patient (e.g. a favorite cup or spoon) makes the challenge appear more natural as well. Diversions such as toys, games, or DVDs are also helpful.

Your Oral Food Challenge
Your child_______________________________ has been scheduled for an Oral Food Challenge in the Special Procedure Area on the 2nd floor of the Comer Center for Children and Specialty Care on ________________________________ at ___________________________ am/pm.

Please bring the following food(s) to be used for the challenge:
_____________________________________________________________________________________

Checklist:

☐ Stop all antihistamines 3 days before the challenge (e.g. cetirizine, loratidine, fexofenadine, diphenhydramine)
☐ Continue all asthma medications even on the day of the challenge. Contact your doctor if your child has been on oral steroids (e.g. prednisone, prednisolone, etc.) in the 2 weeks prior to the challenge or has had to use his rescue inhaler (e.g. albuterol, levalbuterol) in the 2 days prior to the challenge
☐ Pack a bag with games, toys, DVDs to bring to the oral food challenge as you will be at the procedure for several house
☐ Pack food to be used for the challenge as instructed by your doctor
☐ Call before leaving for the challenge if your child develops a fever, nausea, vomiting, wheezing or other illness in the days prior to the challenge or on the day of the challenge
☐ No food 2 hours prior to the challenge (clear liquids are okay)
☐ Bring your epinephrine autoinjector to the procedure with you