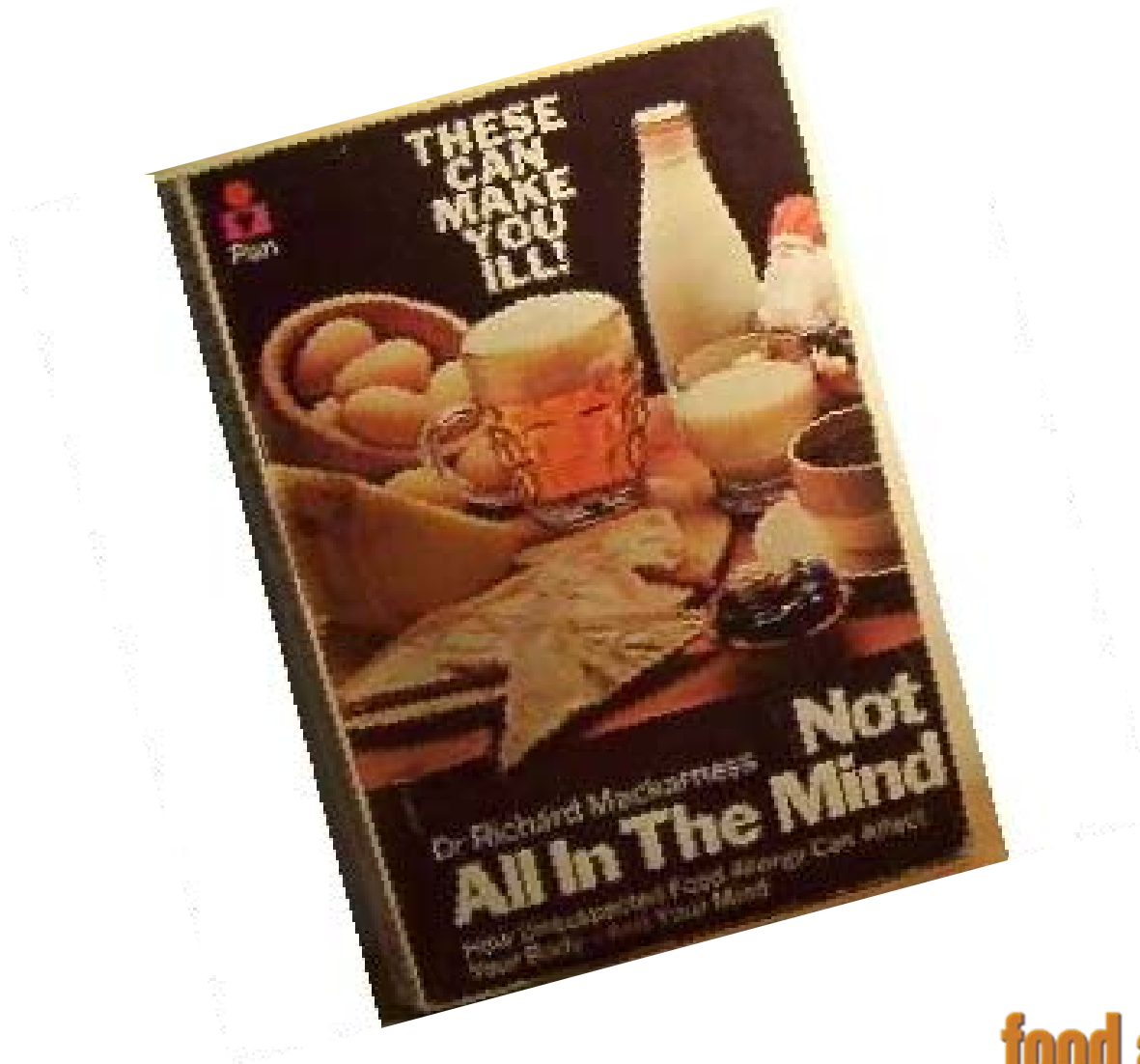


A history of food allergy

The evolving story over two decades

By David Reading

1976: food 'allergy' in the public eye



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A definition of allergy

- **Allergy** occurs when the immune system reacts adversely to a food or substance that is harmless for most people.
- **Anaphylaxis** is at the extreme end – severe and rapidly-occurring.

Food intolerance

- Does not generally involve the immune system.
- Requires larger amounts of food.
- Symptoms take longer to occur.
- Symptoms may include headache, digestive discomfort, sluggishness.
- Example: lactose intolerance.

“My skirt doesn’t fit. It must be an allergy.”



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Milestones in allergy research

- Hugh Sampson's work on food challenges and predictive values for skin and IgE antibody assays.
- Hugh Sampson's identification of asthma as the major risk factor for fatal anaphylaxis.
- Isle of Wight research showed a huge rise in peanut allergy among children.

Sarah's story – why I got involved



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Tragedy – a catalyst for change

- Josephine Turner, aged 17, died 1992 after eating a pretzel containing peanut butter at her school.
- Michaela Mortimer, aged 16, died 1993 after eating a peanut wafer at her school.
- Rachel O'Neill, aged 26, died 1993 after eating peanuts in a Thai meal served in a restaurant.

1993 paper on anaphylaxis

- Foods are a major cause of anaphylaxis.
- Paucity of data on prevalence or frequency of deaths.
- Deaths may be wrongly recorded.
- Allergen avoidance easier to advocate than undertake.
- The formation of a self-help group would put pressure on manufacturers.

Food induced anaphylaxis – death can and must be avoided. (BJCP, 1993). David Hide.

The growth of support organisations

- Asthma UK: Roots go back to 1927
- Coeliac UK: 1968
- FAAN (in the USA): 1991
- Allergy UK: 1991
- The Anaphylaxis Campaign: 1994
- Others around the world

The Anaphylaxis Campaign

- Helps individuals with severe allergies.
- Seeks to ensure high-quality allergen labelling.
- Promotes awareness in the catering sector.
- Runs online training for schools.
- Various information tools – magazines, website etc.

The 1990s: a media scare story



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A mother's letter, 1994

- “My little boy suffered a very severe allergic reaction to a slice of cake in a restaurant while we were on holiday. The cake contained walnuts. I am terrified I will lose him. We are living with a ticking timebomb.”

– from the Anaphylaxis Campaign files

The patient's lifeline

- EpiPen developed based on Combo-pen for chemical warfare antidote.
- 1980: EpiPen launched and registered in USA.
- Late 1980s: EpiPen available on 'named patient basis' in UK.
- 1996: EpiPen registered in UK.
- 2001: Anapen registered in UK.
- 2010: Jext registered in UK.

The mid 1990s



- Nicholas Soames launched an awareness campaign throughout industry.
- Retailers and manufacturers began to develop robust policies.
- Industry organisations (e.g. BRC, FDF) developed codes of practice.
- EC discussed mandatory allergen labelling.

Actions by MAFF and the FSA

- ‘Allergy aware’ pack aimed at caterers.
- Web guidance for industry and consumers.
- Consumer attitude surveys.
- ‘May contain’ guidance published.
- Guidance for caterers published.
- PLUS the FSA’s major allergy research programme.

Advice on eating peanuts

- 1998: Government Committee on Toxicity issued guidance for families on introduction of peanuts into the diet.
- Mothers in atopic families ‘may wish’ to avoid peanuts while pregnant and breastfeeding.
- Translated in the media as ‘Mothers-to-be told to avoid peanuts’.
- (Advice rescinded 2009).

Further UK deaths

- 1995: Lucie Crawford died after eating a Chinese takeaway.
- 1995: Louise Westlake died during her company's Christmas dinner.
- 1998: Laura Thrasher died on her first night at Cambridge University.

Victim: Olympic athlete Ross Baillie



1999: Ross ate a coronation chicken sandwich – not knowing it contained nuts.

Commons statement, June 1999

- Edward Davey, MP: 'When a fit, gifted young athlete dies because of a few bites of a chicken sandwich, it is surely our duty to ask whether his death and others like it could have been avoided.'

2003: new legislation on allergens

- European legislation requires the mandatory labelling of 11 allergens (plus sulphites) in pre-packed food.
- This abolished 'the 25 per cent rule.'
- Molluscs and lupin added 2006.

Why lupin?

- Sweet lupin is grown for its edible seeds.
- The seeds can be eaten raw or used to make flour.
- Reactions occur on the Continent – and occasionally in the UK.

Reactions to lupin in the UK

- A man with peanut allergy reacted to a meat pie. The pastry – imported from France – contained lupin flour.
- A woman reacted to an Asda apple flan and an onion ring. Both contained lupin flour.
- A woman reacted to bread bought at an in-store bakery. The bread contained lupin flour.

The next one on the list?



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The rise in kiwifruit allergy

- Kiwi introduced in the UK late 1960s.
- The 1980s – emerging cases seen mainly in adults.
- The 1990s – severe cases becoming common in children and infants.

Other triggers include...



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Buckwheat – one to watch?



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Allergy to buckwheat

- A major allergen in Japan – where labelling is mandatory.
- Not a true cereal – related to rhubarb.
- Used in savoury pancakes, Japanese noodles, Russian blinis.
- **UK case:** A young woman suffered anaphylaxis after eating canapés.
- The woman tested positive to buckwheat.

The rise in 'may contain'

- “I had always thought food labelling was there to help and protect the consumer. But now I wonder if it really exists to protect the food industry.”

Mother of an allergic child

A teenager's view

- “Food companies put nut warnings on everything to cover themselves. I just can't believe the risk is real. I'll eat anything with a warning on it.”

From the files of the Anaphylaxis Campaign

A shopper's view

- "We ignore all 'may contain' warnings since we found one on a cabbage."

From the files of the Anaphylaxis Campaign



Is this a little
extreme?

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Allergy advice

- Contains **milk**.
- **Recipe:** No nuts.
- **Ingredients:** Cannot guarantee nut free.
- **Factory:** Product made in nut free area, but nuts used elsewhere.



Caution

- This product should not be used as food for babies.

Ingredients

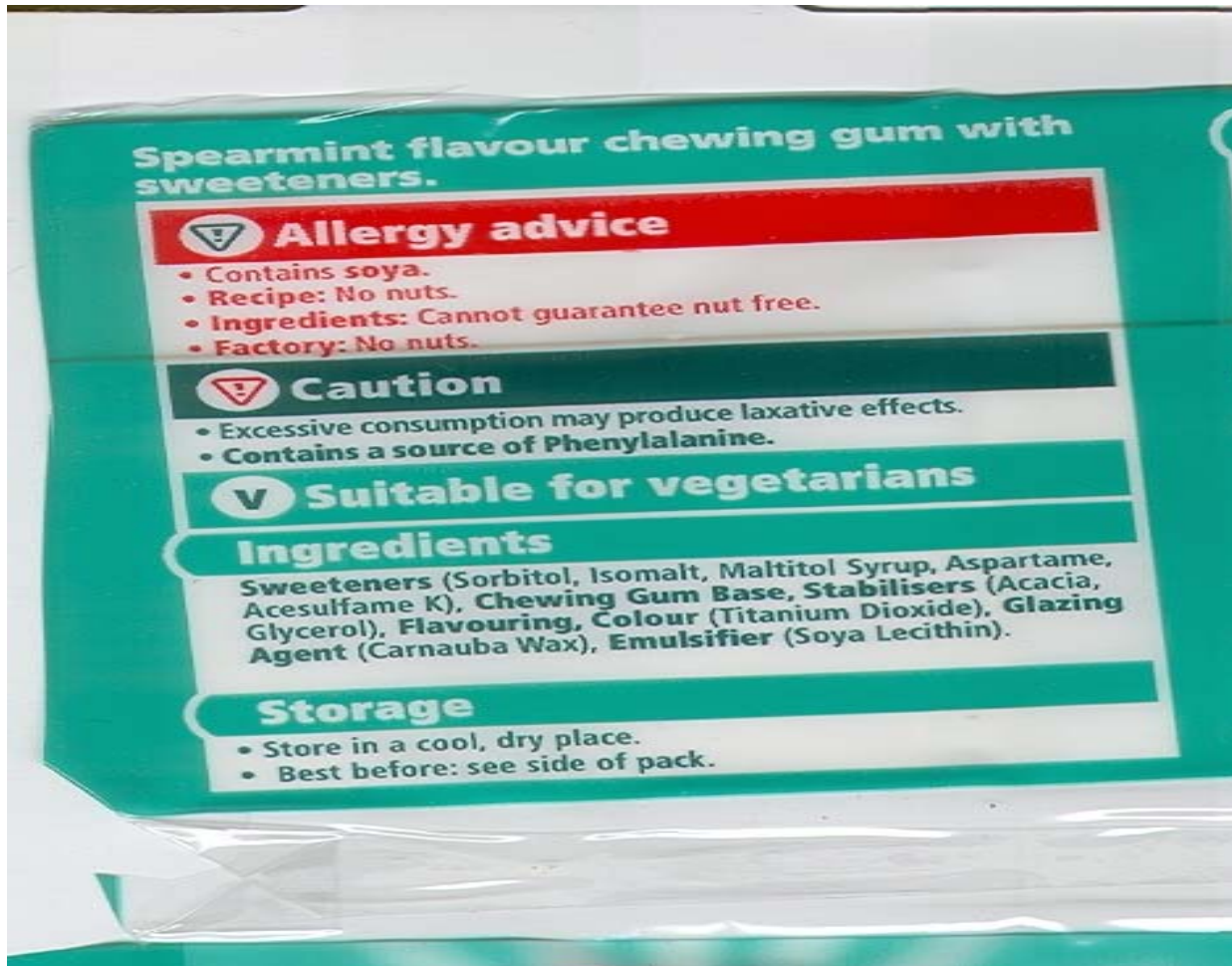
Milk, Stabiliser (Disodium Phosphate), Vitamin D₃.

Preparation guidelines

- **Shake well before opening.**
- Dilute one part evaporated milk with 1½ parts water to obtain the equivalent of full cream milk.
- For tea, coffee and cocoa use undiluted.
- **Not suitable for microwave cooking.**

Can of milk
with a nut
statement!

And a packet of chewing gum!



Food allergy alerts

- The Anaphylaxis Campaign sends out allergy alerts to allergic members.
- 36 alerts sent out in 2006.
- 58 in 2007.
- 65 in 2008.
- 46 in 2009.
- 40 in 2010.



Product alerts – examples

- Undeclared egg in spaghetti bolognese. Packaging had been printed using an old artwork file.
- A packaging error involving pumpkin and red pepper soup. Some product contained mushroom and **celeriac** soup.
- Ghee in a biriyani not identified as coming from milk.
- A chocolate covered peanut found in a pack of chocolate covered raisins.

The advent of 'free from'

“We’re fed up with you telling us what we can’t eat. Will somebody tell us what we **can** eat.”

– a common complaint.

The downside of 'free from'

- Shoppers take short cuts and ignore the ingredient list.
- The phrase 'free from' suggests an absolute value. Consumers expect it to mean **total** absence.
- Some 'free from' products have been tested to reveal traces.
- People have reacted.

A mistake with 'free from'

INGREDIENTS

Water, Chicken Breast (26%), Cous Cous (13%), Tomato Pulp, Onions, Orange Juice, Yogurt (2%), Raisins, Vegetable Oil, Parsley, Apricots, Tomato Purée, Coriander, Modified Maize Starch, Stabilisers (Guar Gum, Xanthan Gum), Dextrose, Mint, Salt, Sugar, Paprika Powder, Garlic, Caramelised Sugar, Cumin, Black Pepper, Cinnamon, Chilli Powder.

ALLERGY ADVICE



CONTAINS: MILK.

FREE FROM: EGGS, SOYA, GLUTEN.

MAY CONTAIN NUT OR NUT TRACES.

ALTHOUGH EVERY CARE HAS BEEN TAKEN TO REMOVE BONES, SOME MAY REMAIN.



Case history

- Packs of carob ices were labelled '100 per cent dairy free'.
- A toddler reacted.
- Tests were positive for milk.
- One carob sample contained 1.6 per cent casein, the other 2.7 per cent.
- The suspect batch was recalled.

The message

- Food companies wishing to label products 'free from X' must be confident there is virtually no chance of cross-contact.

New rules on gluten labelling

- New regulations come into force January 2012.
- “Gluten-free” statement will mean the product contains 20ppm or less of gluten.
- “Very low gluten” will mean no more than 100ppm.
- FSA says testing will be required to support these claims.

The quest for thresholds

- Is there a dose beneath which people are unlikely to react?
- Can safe levels be set that industry could work to?
- Research is moving closer to finding answers.

Hope for the future

- Can we stop children becoming allergic to foods?
- The EAT and LEAP studies want to show that introducing allergenic foods **early** may prevent allergy from developing.
- This challenges established thinking.
- LEAP is working with peanut.
- EAT with milk, peanut, fish, wheat, eggs and sesame.

Hope for the future

- Can allergy be 'cured'?
- 2011: Researchers at Addenbrooke's achieve further success in desensitising children to peanut.
- Oral immunotherapy (OIT) works by introducing small amounts of peanut into children's diets and gradually building up to larger amounts.
- US researchers also having success with OIT and with sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT).

Please stay in touch

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