

Amazing but NOT AMAZED

Often I take some time to reflect on how it was for me to grow up with a peanut allergy as a child in the 70's and 80's compared to today. When I was a kid the internet did not exist, there were no national organizations focused on food allergy, no clinical practice guidelines, no food labeling law, and so much more. My mother did not have access to all of the resources and training that many parents have today.

Some days, I truly wonder how I survived my childhood. Gasp.... I was not given epinephrine until I was 18 years old and at that time there were no epi auto injectors, it was epinephrine with a syringe. In my younger years, I had to go to the emergency room for "asthma attacks" when it could of really been because of my peanut allergy. In fact, years later one of my doctors told me that before the development of newer medicines epinephrine was used to treat asthma; this reinforces that it is a quite safe and an important life saving medication. In elementary school, I often traded foods at lunch with classmates. There were no "peanut free" tables of "peanut" tables. Foods were not required to the same information on the food label as they do today due to the Food Allergy Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA).

What is **amazing** to me is what has been done to move food allergy forward and help those of us with food allergies get along in life a bit easier over the last 20 years. There are numerous people and organizations that have worked hard and are still working to make this a reality. So much has changed since I was a child. There are numerous resources and so many ways that people can connect to help each other in order to thrive with food allergies/intolerances. This is positive and **amazing**.

I first noticed all that was being done in the food allergy community when I was a new Registered Dietitian in the 1990's and went to my first food allergy conference in Baltimore, Maryland by The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN), www.foodallergy.org. For me this was like going to Disney World for the first time. I met so many people interested and knowledgeable about food allergy, but most of all I felt as though I was not alone. None of my childhood friends had a food allergy/intolerance and it was amazing to know so many others had to deal with my same issue. At lunchtime I noted the food nametags showing which foods I could eat and there were peanut free deserts! Wow- what a great experience for me! Now, I try to go to the FAAN conferences when I can, <http://www.foodallergy.org/section/food-allergy-conferences11>. At that first conference I met one of the most renowned allergists and a FAAN medical advisors, Dr. Robert Wood, www.drrobertwood.com, who also has a peanut allergy. Since that first conference I have been involved with FAAN in many ways. I am a lifetime member, I partnered with one of FAAN's co-founders for my Masters research, I have answered the Diet Dilemmas column for their newsletter, I have spoken at one of the conferences, and more. I guess life can come full circle.

I can go on an on about how today dealing with a food allergy is so much easier. However, there are several major food allergy issues that make me **NOT AMAZED** and we have so much more to do. Did you know that not all Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) are equipped with epinephrine? www.foodallergy.org/page/emergency-medical-services. Recently, I was in a neighboring town in Springfield, Pennsylvania and I saw several EMTs at a restaurant. I approached them and asked them if they carried epinephrine in their ambulance and they said NO. I am **NOT AMAZED**. All EMTs should be equipped with this life saving medication. If we are to call 911 when we have an emergency should the first responders be equipped to help us?

The recent tragic death of 7 year-old Ammaria Johnson, on January 2, 2012 has highlighted the need for schools to also be accessed with epinephrine a life-saving medication. www.cnn.com/2012/01/04/health/virginia-allergy-death/index.html

We know that food allergy affects 6-8% of children and there is no cure. Epinephrine is easy to administer and life-saving. I am **NOT AMAZED** that schools don't have access to these medications and it is tragic that Ammaria died from not getting epinephrine in time. This really hit home, as this could have been me when I was her age and as a mother, I can't imagine what her family is going through. Read more about this important national issue and help advocate for schools having access to epinephrine, www.foodallergy.org/page/school-access-to-emergency-epinephrine-act1. I carry two epi-pens with my daily and when I travel I take at least four epi-pens. Yes- I have had to use them (future blog post). My hope is one day how far food allergy has come will all be **amazing**.

My Epi-Pens

