

“Because I Love Someone With Food Allergies” FAAN Conference Summary

Last weekend, Saturday, April 28, 2012 I attended the 19th Annual Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Conference (www.foodallergy.org), “Because I Love Someone With Food Allergies”, in Tarrytown, NY. I attended the conference on behalf of the Pediatric Nutrition Practice Group (PNPG), (www.pediatricnutrition.org) of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, (www.eatright.org). I will be writing a summary of the conference for the PNPG member newsletter from a Registered Dietitian and Clinical Focus. For this blog post I want to focus on the personal side of the conference from my perspective of someone with food allergy. I have presented at previous FAAN conferences and it is also great to be an attendee! If you Love Someone with Food Allergies or have food allergies I strongly recommend attending a FAAN conference which are typically held in the Spring of each year in various locations. I know this is along post, but I added headings in case you are interested in one particular section.



Traveling to the Conference

Friday night after work (4/27/12), my husband I packed up the car with our 19-month-old daughter, related child gear and headed up to Tarrytown, NY. We got on the road about a half hour later than planned. I am still surprised how much gear is needed for a weekend trip with a toddler. Do we really need all of this “stuff”? I should really learn to minimize. I have traveled this route many times before as I lived in Boston years ago for my dietetic internship at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, Massachusetts. However, since it had been a traveling this way and where to eat a safe peanut free dinner was not fresh in my mind. As we make our way north, we suddenly realize that it is getting dark and its 7:30 pm and we should stop somewhere as it is getting late for our daughter to eat. We are near Rutgers, NJ so we figure there should be lots of options and take an exit. We typically do not choose Fast Food, but when you have a deadly peanut allergy, chain restaurants can usually provide a safe option almost wherever you go. Qdoba is spotted and we turn in. After a safe peanut free meal and a diaper change we are back on the road. About an hour later we arrive at our hotel, which is where the conference will be the next day. While checking in the hotel employee asks if we are here for the conference and we start talking. He asks if my daughter has a food allergy, I state none so far that we are aware of. I tell him that actually I have a deadly peanut allergy and had more food allergies as a child that I luckily outgrew. He was very interested and we started discussed this some more. Now that I am a mom I am always asked if it is my child that has a food allergy when this topic comes up. Adults have food allergies too! After settling into the room we get a good nights sleep.

Conference Day- before conference sessions

I hardly need an alarm clock anymore now that I have a daughter! She woke me in plenty of time Saturday morning to get showered, dressed, and eat some breakfast before the conference. I make sure to bring some safe foods with me with when I travel. I had a packet of peanut free, gluten free oatmeal with me to compliment the fresh fruit and yogurt that was sold at the quick place to eat in the hotel lobby. I make my way to the conference area and go the registration table. The area is buzzing with adults and children! I notice there are several vendors selling their allergen friendly related items. FAAN also has a product table. It is so fun to be able to visit the vendor tables and know that they get it and I can most likely try whatever food samples are there. I look forward to this every time I go. Oh, I see Amanda's Own Confections (www.amandasown.com) and they have free chocolate samples, how great that I can eat them as they are peanut free and gluten free along with dairy free, egg free, tree nut free, sesame free, kosher, and vegan. Wow, then I see plenty of free samples of Plentils from Enjoy Life Foods (www.enjoylifefoods.com www.plentils.com) and I have been wanting to try these new products! I feel like it is my safe Halloween as I go table to table taking allergen friendly samples!

Conference Day- opening sessions

The morning session starts with the “Welcome” from Eleanor Garrow from FAAN and then right into the first session, “Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Management” in the main room by Dr. Anna Nowak-Wegrzyn, an allergist from Mount. Sinai in New York. I look around at the packed room and there are over 200 attendees, parents and caregivers, relatives, 44 teens (a record high), health care professionals, and more. It is a great turnout and I feel much positive energy. I can't tell you how many times I have heard a similar talk about food allergies and management, but I have never heard Dr. Nowak-Wegrzyn and she was fantastic. Her talk was just the right mix of clinical information with practicality for the various backgrounds of the audience. Her advice on who needs epinephrine was useful for many which included those with:

- prior anaphylactic episode
- prior systemic allergic reaction
- food allergy and asthma
- known allergy to peanut, tree nuts, fish, and crustacean shellfish.



Conference Day- adult breakout session with Allergic Girl

The next part of the conference was a choice of breakout sessions. This was one of the most anticipated sessions for me as there was a breakout on “Adults Living with Food Allergies” led by Allergic Girl, Sloane Miller, who I have wanted to meet! Those who attended were a small but supportive group who either had food allergies or parents who had teens who were becoming young adults. The time went quick as we discussed common issues and solutions for various situations such as going to college with food allergies. I hope this type of session is included every year as there is definitely a need and I think as more people become aware of the inclusion of adult focused topics they may seek to participate. Sloane has great energy and it is great to meet her in-person since we have only met on Twitter (@allergicgirl, @peanutfreerd).

Conference Day- mid-morning sessions

After the first set of breakout sessions, there were presentations from a chef, RD who also has food allergies from Wegman's (www.wegmans.com) and a MD, Dr. Greenberger, on “The Emotional Impact of Food Allergies”. Dr. Greenberger actually has a child with food allergies and I have heard him speak before. He does a great job. I could tell the audience really appreciates the topic, advice, and sharing his experiences. The emotional side of food allergies is huge and often not talked about in the traditional medical setting. Parents and caregivers often have their own anxiety over food allergy and keeping their

children safe. He recommends getting help for the person with food allergy and the parents/caregivers when needed including participation in support groups. See the support group links on www.peanutfreerd.org.

Conference Day- lunch

Can I say this is my favorite part? Well, I think I just enjoy the day so much that all are my favorites, but eating at a FAAN conference is like eating at Disney World for me. Obviously, FAAN understands food allergy and although the lunch is a buffet, which is typically high risk, this is a safe meal for me and many others. The foods are clearly identified and there are many options. I know from previous discussions with FAAN that they work closely with each conference site before the conference to enable a safe eating experience for those attending with food allergies.

I ate lunch with several other attendees from the Pennsylvania, Delaware area. All were moms of children with food allergies. I can tell they enjoyed sharing their stories and getting support from one another. They are amazing women who are doing all they can to help their children and be an advocate for food allergy. It is nice to connect with such positive people! One tip several moms stated is if your child has a food allergy get involved with the school's Parent Teacher Association (PTA). This is a good place to find out more about what is happening in the school and be an advocate for food allergies.

Conference Day- afternoon breakout session with Lori Sandler of Divvies

It was a tough choice in which afternoon breakout to attend, but I choose the “Allergy-Free Food Preparation Workshop” by Lori Sandler, co-creator of Divvies (www.divvies.com). Divvies does not use peanuts, tree nuts, eggs or milk. Some products are also gluten free. I have had their products before and they are yummy. I got to the session a little late as I went to say hello to my daughter and husband after lunch. When I got there the room was packed and I quickly identified including delicious looking chocolate covered strawberries! I had to have one. What is not to like about Lori? Her name is the same as mine and she has a passion for food allergies! All jokes aside, she is a great presenter. She discussed how she learned to cook allergen friendly and gave some demonstrations! There were many discussions about recipe substitutions and solutions for baking allergen free. Divvies recently came out with a cookbook which is available on their website and on Amazon.com.

Conference Day- afternoon sessions

After the afternoon breakout Sloane Miller, a.k.a. Allergic Girl (allergicgirl.com), presented “Allergic Girl: Adventures of Living Well with Food Allergies”. She discussed how she gets along in the world living with her food allergies and shared tips for others! I can tell the teens LOVE Allergic Girl. I was sitting near a few and I can tell they were listening to her every word! For me, listening to Allergic Girl is like replaying some of my own history. We are close in age and were both brought up in a time when there wasn't much support for food allergy, before FAAN was created. It is amazing that this many years later I can feel connected about my food allergy with another adult. I am glad that many kids today have the resources and technology to support each other.

The next two sessions focused on food allergy research. Lori Sandler gave a talk on “Clinical Trials from a Parent Perspective” and a “Research” update from Dr. Anna Nowak-Wegrzyn. We all want a cure for food allergies. These sessions are important for those considering participating in a clinical trial as well as learning what currently being researched and on the horizon!

Conference Day- Q&A sessions

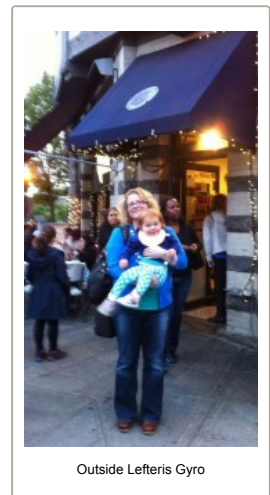
One of the best parts about the conference for me is the Q&A sessions that FAAN has. There are two sessions, one after the morning sessions and the other after the afternoon session. The speakers are available to answer the participant's questions. Here is where you can learn about additional concerns or unclear situations that people have about food allergies and get a quick, reliable answer!

Conference Day- Closing

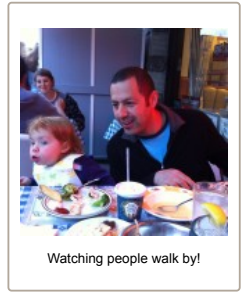
Of course this whole conference would not be possible without all of the work that the FAAN staff does and I really appreciate their efforts so that I can enjoy the day too! I look forward to attending next year. I hope you will consider attending a FAAN conference in the future.

Conference Day- Lefteris Gyro dinner In Tarrytown

I get back to my room and my daughter and husband are napping. Ahhh, sounds good!!! I rest a few minutes before we head out to dinner. We decided to drive to the “main street” of Tarrytown. My husband, the great supportive man that he is already scouted out safe eating options. We decided on a Greek restaurant, Lefteris (www.lefterisgyro.com), which also had outdoor seating and it was a gorgeous night. I am half Greek so it is nice to have some great Greek Food with my daughter and husband to end a wonderful day! As soon as the dates are advertised for the next FAAN conference I will put it on my calendar.



Outside Lefteris Gyro



Watching people walk by!