
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Are we afraid of food?



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ENGLISH

NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm Neil...

Alice

... and I'm Alice. Neil, what are you eating?

Neil

Peanuts.

Alice

Hmm. Did you know that one of the producers, here, has an allergy to peanuts?

Neil

No, I didn't – but they're not in the studio with us, so it doesn't matter, does it?

Alice

It only takes a tiny piece of peanut to cause a big allergic reaction in some people. An **allergy** by the way, is a condition that makes you feel ill after eating, touching or breathing in a particular substance.

Neil

And food allergies are the subject of today's show.

Alice

Alright, put your peanuts down, Neil and answer today's quiz question. What substance is used to treat a severe allergic reaction? Is it...

a) penicillin?

b) adrenalin?

Or c) aspirin?

Neil

OK, well, I'm going to go for a) penicillin.

Alice

Well, we'll find out if that's the right answer later on. Now let's listen to Dr Marianne Williams talking about why being too clean may not be a good thing. She is a dietician here in the UK.

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Dr Marianne Williams, gastroenterology dietician, UK

For roughly the first month of life the immune system is switched off in essence and everything they [babies] get exposed to in that first month in life – dogs, cats, aunts, uncles, grannies, grandpas, family, dirt – everything – that is where they build up all the bacteria that are then going to colonise their gut in the future. Now, if you're born into a very sterile environment, as is increasingly the case in the western world, everything's kept terribly clean, and one of the theories is that we just are not getting enough exposure to a variety of bacteria at that very very early stage in that first month of life.

Alice

Dr Marianne Williams. The **immune system** is our body's defence against infection. And it's **switched off** – or not working – for the first month of a baby's life.

Neil

And through exposure to lots of things in our environment – that's family, pets, dirt and so on – young babies meet different bacteria for the first time which **colonise** – or live and grow in – their guts.

Alice

Yes, but in a sterile environment babies don't **get exposed to** – or don't meet – a wide enough variety of bacteria. **Sterile** means completely clean and free of bacteria. And there's a theory that being too clean and bacteria-free – now we have soap, antibiotics and better sanitation – has led to an increase in allergies.

Neil

So dirty play for babies is good – mud, pets, picking stuff up off the floor and eating it.

Alice

Did you use to eat food off the floor when you were little, Neil?

Neil

Used to? I still do. I enjoy food from the floor!

Alice

Well, Neil, what can I say? We're both lucky to be allergy-free. I have a friend who has an allergy to **gluten** – a protein found in wheat and some other grains – and she has to be very careful about what she eats so she doesn't get ill.

Neil

The supermarkets are quite helpful, though, aren't they, with products 'free from this' and 'free from that'?

Alice

This is helpful, yes. But the food industry is now marketing their products to attract consumers who don't have a **proven** – or tested – allergy.

Neil

Why would you buy free-from foods if you don't have a food allergy?

Alice

Well, people have started to believe that certain foods – like gluten or dairy – are bad for us, though there isn't any medical evidence to support this. Let's hear about how **ricketts** – a disease caused by a lack of Vitamin D in the diet – is affecting some children in the UK. This is BBC reporter Mike Williams.

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Mike Williams, BBC reporter

Ricketts is common in the developing world but this is London in the 21st century. These children aren't malnourished because they're too poor to eat well – it's the opposite. Their often middle-class parents are spending money to give them foods with ingredients taken out. It's as if some of us have become unnecessarily frightened of our food.

Neil

Ricketts usually affects **malnourished** children from poor countries – children who don't have enough to eat – and it makes their bones weak. But here in London some parents are buying their children expensive free-from foods – for example to avoid dairy – and are sometimes making them very ill.

Alice

It sounds crazy, doesn't it?

Neil

Yeah... it's **nuts!** Get it? Nuts.

Alice

Very good.

Neil

Yes. Nuts - that means crazy. Now I think it's time for the answer to today's quiz question.

Alice

OK, then. So earlier in the show I asked: What substance is used to treat a severe allergic reaction? Is it... a) penicillin? b) adrenalin? Or c) aspirin?

Neil

I said a) penicillin.

Alice

And you were wrong, Neil! The correct answer is b) adrenalin. An injection of adrenalin can be used to treat **anaphylaxis** – or severe allergic reactions – to insect stings, foods, drugs, and other allergens. Antibiotics such as penicillin treat bacterial infections and aspirin is a painkiller you might take for a headache.

Neil

OK, can you tell us the words we heard today again please, Alice?

Alice

Sure. They are:

allergy

immune system

switched off

colonise

get exposed to

sterile

gluten

proven

ricketts

malnourished

nuts

anaphylaxis

Neil

Well, that's the end of today's 6 Minute English. Don't be afraid to join us again soon.

Alice

You know where to find us, don't you? Go to bbclearningenglish.com where you'll find grammar points, vocabulary and more editions of 6 Minute English.

Both

Bye.

Vocabulary

allergy

a condition that makes you feel ill after eating, touching or breathing in a particular substance

immune system

our body's defences against infection and disease

switched off

(in this context) not working

colonise

live and grow in

get exposed to

(in this context) meet or encounter

sterile

completely clean with no bacteria

gluten

a protein found in wheat and some other grains

proven

tested or true

rickets

a disease caused by a lack of Vitamin D in the diet and affects bone development in children

malnourished

not having enough to eat or enough of the food you need to keep you in good health

nuts

crazy

anaphylaxis

a severe allergic reaction