

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### ***EAACI: Food allergies in children cause anxiety and loneliness, have dramatic impact on their quality of life***

**Zurich/Venice, 19 February 2011 – Children who are allergic to food are found to be suffering from anxiety and are increasingly more lonely; One allergic child out of five never attends peers' parties, while one in four always brings along "safe" food.**

The burden of food allergies and the risk they can escalate to life-threatening diseases is particularly heavy on children, whose normally active and sociable lifestyle can be severely limited and frustrated by the effort to keep them away from potentially dangerous food. According to a study presented at the 2011 Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Meeting by the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI), held Feb 17-19 in Venice, Italy, 23 percent of allergic children are no longer curious to try new food to vary their diet, considered too monotonous by most of them. A child out of ten also gives up crucial physical activity for fear of anaphylactic shock triggered by exercise.

"About 17 percent of allergic children, regardless of their age, never go to a party or a picnic with friends, while 24 percent are forced to bring along something to eat," says Prof. Maria Antonella Muraro, Chair of the EAACI Meeting. The study, headed by Prof. Muraro, was carried out by the Center for the study and treatment of allergies and food intolerances at the hospital of the University of Padua, Italy on 107 young patients and their mothers.

"Also, 5 to 15 per cent of cases of anaphylactic shock can be triggered by physical activity following the consumption of small amounts of allergenic food that would otherwise be harmless, so one allergic child out of ten also stops every kind of exercise," Prof. Muraro added. "Allergies are often downplayed as a minor problem, but the life of an allergic person can be hell. Allergic children show to be more afraid of being sick and a higher level of anxiety about food than children with diabetes. The constant alarm surrounding them is taking a toll on their development and well-being."

Another worrisome problem adding to the poor quality of life of allergic patients, especially the younger ones, is the need to carry life-saving devices at all times, such as epinephrine auto-injectors, "loaded" with enough drug to prevent death in case of severe anaphylactic shock. They are easy to use, light to carry and discreet, but one out of three patients still leaves home without them.

"Within 8 or 10 minutes the shot reverses the symptoms, ranging from urticaria to respiratory distress, cardiovascular collapse and gastrointestinal problems including vomiting and diarrhoea," explains Prof. Muraro. "It can cause minor side effects, such as irritability or tremors that end as soon as the adrenaline is processed by the body, generally within a couple of hours. Patients should not be scared, even those who have a heart disease: the possible side effects are negligible in comparison to the opportunity to



save your life."

EAACI has issued recommendations to prevent the spread of allergies in children, encouraging mothers and family members who live with the child to stop smoking. Eating fruits and vegetables, increasing the intake of antioxidants and vitamin D is also supposed to provide further support in the prevention of allergic diseases.

"The mechanisms of immuno-tolerance in human beings are still matter of research although we are getting promising results. EAACI is committed in the next years to devoting all necessary efforts to improve knowledge and raise awareness in the field," says Prof. Cezmi Akdis, EAACI President-Elect.

### **"Double Allergy": 8.5 million Europeans are allergic to fruits, vegetables and pollens**

Hypersensitivity to pollens of trees such as birch, hazel or grasses that can aggravate allergic reactions especially in spring is diagnosed in over 8.5 million people also allergic to food, showed research presented at the EAACI Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Meeting. People suffering from a cross reaction between food and pollen are often tormented by sneezing, tears, a burning sensation on the tongue and swollen lips.

"Some of the proteins of trees' allergens are commonly found in other plant species and the list of foods that cause a reaction with pollens extends continuously," says Prof. Muraro. "Being allergic to peaches, apples, apricots and plums often means not being able to tolerate birch pollen. Other plants that are often causing problems include celery, fennel and soybeans as well as tropical fruits such as avocado and passion fruit."

While peaches and apricots are responsible for a high number of allergic reactions in Italy and Spain, apples are more likely to be a problem in France and Germany. Plum is an issue in the UK, while celery and fennel make more "victims" in Switzerland and Holland. The differences depend on the various degrees of exposure to pollen or on dietary habits, but also on the diversity of allergens found in fruits and vegetables in different countries.

### **Food Allergies and Yogurt: an unexpected help**

Yogurt may be useful for the prevention and treatment of food allergies, shows research presented at the EAACI Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Meeting.

"Probiotics have an effect on the immune system and restore optimal intestinal flora," explains Prof. Susanne Halken, EAACI Pediatrics Section Chairperson. "This may help the body to properly recognize the allergens, without triggering a response to food that is, in itself, harmless. Moreover, lactic acid bacteria have a well-known anti-inflammatory effect, which means that they can help ease the symptoms of food allergies. Not all types of probiotics have been shown to prevent or ease allergic symptoms though and beware that an effective dosage would need to be much higher than what can be achieved simply by eating yogurt."

### **About EAACI :**

EAACI - The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology is a non-profit organisation active in the field of allergic and immunologic diseases such as asthma, rhinitis, eczema, occupational allergy, food and drug allergy and anaphylaxis. EAACI was founded in 1956 in Florence and has become the largest medical association in Europe in the field of allergy and



clinical immunology. It includes 6'100 members from 107 countries, as well as 41 National Allergy Societies.

Throughout 2011, EAACI will develop different activities to celebrate the 100th anniversary of immunotherapy in Allergy, which will aim at increasing the knowledge in this field among healthcare professionals, increase awareness in the general population, and finally, promote the availability of immunotherapy for allergic patients.

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