

Parental Decision-Making: A Case of Hidden Allergen Exposure in a Child with Sesame Allergy from Consuming “Dubai Chocolate”

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Dear Editor,

Social media has become an influential tool in shaping parental decision-making, particularly in the realm of child health. However, this influence can have unintended and potentially hazardous consequences, especially when it concerns children with known food allergies. A recent incident serves as a poignant example of the risks associated with social media-driven choices.

We present the case of a 4-year-old child with a known sesame allergy who developed extensive urticaria and pruritus shortly after consuming a product promoted on social media as “Dubai chocolate.” The mother of the child, having been influenced by the positive testimonials posted online, decided to purchase the product and feed it to her child. However, the packaging failed to explicitly disclose the presence of sesame, which was not immediately recognized as a potential allergen by the parent.

Approximately 15 minutes after consuming a match-box-sized portion of the chocolate referred to as “Dubai chocolate” on social media, the patient developed pruritic, raised skin lesions that blanched upon pressure, initially appearing on the trunk. These lesions subsequently spread to the legs and arms. No systemic findings other than cutaneous involvement were observed. The family sought medical attention at the emergency department due to these symptoms.

During the emergency department evaluation, widespread urticarial lesions were observed throughout the body, but there was no involvement of other organ systems. The patient did not exhibit hypotension, hypoxia, tachypnea, or bradycardia. Due to the extensive nature of the urticarial reaction, antihistamines and methylprednisolone were administered. The urticarial lesions completely resolved approximately 30 minutes after treatment.

The chocolate was a handmade product sold in a pastry shop without any labeling. However, upon contacting the manufacturer, it was determined that the product contained cocoa, cow’s milk, pistachios, and sesame. The skin prick test (SPT) was performed with pistachios, cow’s milk, and cocoa, and no atopy was detected. However, the SPT conducted with sesame resulted in a 5×6 mm papule. Subsequently, an oral food challenge was performed with pistachios, cow’s milk, and cocoa, and no allergic reaction occurred. Based on these findings, sesame was identified as the likely cause of the reaction following the consumption of Dubai chocolate.

This case highlights not only the impact of social media on parental behavior but also the dangers of hidden allergens in commercially available products. This case underscores the significant risks posed by hidden allergens in ready-made foods. Sesame, a common food allergen, is frequently found in a variety of products, including baked

goods, snacks, and chocolates. However, due to cross-contamination during manufacturing processes or inadequate labeling, allergens like sesame may be present in products without being explicitly listed on the packaging. This poses a considerable risk to individuals with food allergies, particularly in children, who may inadvertently consume potentially harmful ingredients without the awareness of their caregivers. Cross-contamination and lack of transparency in the labeling remain significant concerns that warrant attention from both food manufacturers and regulatory bodies (1-3).

Sesame allergy is a significant and growing concern worldwide, particularly in pediatric populations. The prevalence of sesame allergy depends on local diets and ranges from 0.1% to 0.9% (3). In Turkey, sesame has been used in the food culture for many years in the production of simit, halva, and tahini. Even trace amounts of sesame can provoke severe allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis, which can be life-threatening. Given the high potential for severe reactions, individuals with sesame allergies, especially children, must exercise extreme caution when consuming any processed or packaged food, even those that may not clearly indicate the presence of sesame. The risks associated with such hidden allergens highlight the need for heightened awareness among parents, caregivers, and healthcare providers (3,4).

This case highlights a significant lack of awareness regarding the allergen content of handmade and unlabeled food products. These types of products, which are not subject to mandatory labeling, pose a considerable risk for individuals with food allergies. It is crucial for healthcare professionals not only to evaluate allergen exposure cases from a clinical perspective but also to report them to regulatory authorities. To enhance food safety and protect public health, efforts should be made to educate manufacturers about allergen risks and encourage collaboration with the relevant authorities. In this context, establish-

ing a more effective communication mechanism between healthcare institutions and the food industry could help prevent similar cases in the future.

It is also imperative for public health organizations to increase efforts to educate both parents and healthcare providers on the risks of hidden allergens, particularly in the context of processed foods. Regulatory measures should be strengthened to ensure that food products are adequately labeled and that cross-contamination risks are minimized during production. Additionally, social media platforms should assume greater responsibility in curating content that may influence parents' decisions regarding child health, with a focus on promoting accurate and safe information.

In conclusion, this case serves as a reminder of the growing influence of social media on parental decision-making and the critical need for greater vigilance regarding hidden allergens in processed foods. Unlabeled products without allergen warnings can pose a serious risk for children with food allergies. This issue warrants further exploration and action to ensure the safety and well-being of children with food allergies.

Sincerely,

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