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Study aims to unlock the mysteries of peanut allergy

The Alfred's search for a treatment for peanut allergy has been boosted with a \$300,000 grant from the Ilhan Food Allergy Foundation.

Alfred and Monash University allergy specialists are trying to identify the part of the peanut protein that causes allergy in some people. Once these T cell stimulating sites are identified and reproduced without allergy invoking properties, they will form the basis for a vaccine.

Head of the Department of Allergy and Respiratory Medicine, Professor Robyn O'Hehir, said peanut allergy was a major health care problem with the potential for anaphylaxis and even death. Approximately 8% of children and 2% of adults suffer from food allergy, of which peanut hypersensitivity is the most common cause of fatal anaphylaxis.

Robyn said there seemed to be a significant increase in the number of children affected by nut allergy. She said the latest research indicates that one in 20 children suffer from an allergic reaction to food, although usually only nut and shellfish allergy persist to adulthood.

At present, there is no prophylactic treatment for food allergy other than avoidance, with adrenaline for anaphylactic crises.

John Ilhan, who established the successful Crazy John's mobile phone business and founded the Ilhan Food Allergy Foundation in early 2006, said this type of research could make a significant difference in preventing the development of peanut allergies.

"I know from my own personal experience with my six-year old daughter Jaida that I used to eat nuts before I realised that she suffered from a severe nut allergy," John said. "Now this research means that parents in the future can be warned about being more careful in how they interact with their children."

The Ilhan Food Allergy Foundation is dedicated to supporting world leading research, and has committed almost \$700,000 to support research into food allergies being undertaken in Australia.

What's in a kiss?

A loving kiss may inadvertently trigger peanut allergies, according to Alfred researchers.

Doctors have found that a sloppy kiss after eating a peanut butter sandwich contains the nut proteins that may be one way to sensitise a baby to developing a peanut allergy.

The finding, which may help unlock a gap in medical understanding about how babies develop nut allergies, was detailed in a letter in *The Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* recently.

Of course, that doesn't mean they're advocating no kissing and cuddling of babies! Instead, they are encouraging people to try to avoid sloppy kisses after eating nut products!