



# THE BRITISH DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

*The Professional Association for Registered Dietitians*  
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## M e d i a R e l e a s e

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### **The 'pregnant pause' for eating peanuts**

For nearly 10 years, women in the UK with a family history of atopy (asthma, eczema or hay fever), have been advised to avoid eating peanuts during pregnancy and breast-feeding. New research led by Dr Tara Dean and carried out at The David Hide Asthma and Allergy Research Centre on the Isle of Wight (UK) suggests, however, that there is much confusion about peanut-eating: is it mothers-to-be who misunderstand, or health professionals who do not correctly target and explain the messages?

In 1998 the Department of Health issued advice that "pregnant or breast-feeding women who are themselves atopic, or where another first-degree relative of the child is atopic, may wish to avoid eating peanuts and peanut products during pregnancy and lactation". To assess compliance with, and the effects of this recommendation, researchers questioned nearly 840 pregnant women about their diets, and 2 years later, nearly 660 children had skin prick tests to detect peanut sensitization.

"We were surprised to find that 65 per cent of mothers had avoided peanuts during pregnancy" said Carina Venter (allergy specialist dietitian and senior research fellow at the University of Portsmouth) who worked on project. Perhaps even more surprising, was that there was no difference between women with atopy (to whom the advice applied) and women without (to whom it did not). "Peanut avoidance appears to be perceived as a general dietary recommendation during pregnancy. First-time mothers were most receptive to the message, and were almost twice as likely as 'repeat' mothers to change their diets," said Carina.

When the children were 2 years of age, 13 children out of the nearly 660 children tested were found to be sensitized to peanuts (2 per cent of the sample). Eleven of the 13 sensitized children had a family history of atopy. Of the 13 sensitised children, 10 mothers stated that they had avoided peanuts during pregnancy.

The advice on peanuts should be reviewed, conclude the researchers of this study. "No Peanuts" was being confused as universal guidance during pregnancy, and further, maternal peanut avoidance during pregnancy did not appear to be associated with subsequent peanut sensitization in infants.

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Website: <http://www.bda.uk.com>

## **Notes to Editors**

1. Media Contact: Carina Venter, Registered dietitian: Senior Allergy Dietitian, The David Hide Asthma and Allergy Research Centre; 01983 534373; [carina.venter@iow.nhs.uk](mailto:carina.venter@iow.nhs.uk) Or: Senior Research Fellow, University of Portsmouth; 02392 84 4405; [carina.venter@port.ac.uk](mailto:carina.venter@port.ac.uk)
2. For general media enquiries to The British Dietetic Association and requests for interviews should call 0870 580 2517 (9am – 5pm Mon – Fri) or to [pr@bda.uk.com](mailto:pr@bda.uk.com)
3. The 1998 Department of Health advice was issued by the Chief Medical Officer. Calman K. (1998) Peanut Allergy. CMO's Update 19 August 1998, Vol 2. London
4. Dean T, Venter C, Grundy J, Clayton CB, Higgins B. (2007) Government advice on peanut avoidance during pregnancy – is it followed correctly and what is the impact on sensitization? Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics, 20, 95-99
5. The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with nearly 6,000 members. About two-thirds of members are employed in the National Health Service. The remaining members work in education, industry, research, sport settings or freelance.
6. Registered dietitians hold the only legally-recognisable graduate qualification in nutrition and dietetics. They are experts in interpreting and translating the science of nutrition into practical ways of promoting nutritional well-being, disease treatment and the prevention of nutrition-related problems. Their advice is sound and based on current scientific evidence.
7. Registration, awarded by the Health Professionals Council, is an indication that a dietitian is fit to practise and is working within an agreed statement of conduct.

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