

Fatal peanut allergies could be cured by probiotic bacteria, say Australian doctors

About 80 per cent of children with peanut allergies were able to tolerate peanuts after being treated with large doses of the probiotic *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*



In Australia, about ten per cent of 12-month-old babies and 3 per cent of infants are allergic to peanuts Photo: ALAMY

By Jonathan Pearlman, Sydney

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A strain of probiotic bacteria could offer a cure for potentially fatal peanut allergies, according to scientists in Australia.

The breakthrough followed a trial in which a group of children were given increasing amounts of peanut flour, along with a probiotic called *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, over an 18-month period. About 80 per cent of the children who had peanut allergies were subsequently able to tolerate peanuts.

Mimi Tang, the lead researcher, said the families involved believed the treatment had "changed their lives".

"These findings provide the vital first step towards developing a cure for peanut allergy and possibly for all food allergies," she told Melbourne's Herald Sun.

The randomised trial, involving a group of about 30 children, was conducted by Murdoch Childrens Research Institute in Melbourne.

The children, aged one to ten, were given small amounts of peanut flour, gradually building up to two grams, or the equivalent of six or seven nuts.

They were also given daily doses of *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, which is found in yoghurt but was given in quantities equivalent to the amount found in 44 pounds of yoghurt.

Following the treatment, about 80 per cent of the children were able to tolerate four grams of peanut protein, equivalent to about 14 peanuts.

Typically, about four per cent of children would have overcome their peanut allergy during this time.

"These findings provide the vital first step towards developing a cure for peanut allergy and possibly for all food allergies," said Professor Tang.

"It will be a major advance for medical science if we can find a treatment that is curative. It will change the lives completely for children and adults who have peanut allergies."

Rates of peanut allergies have dramatically increased in the past two decades, particularly in developed countries. For most sufferers, the condition is lifelong.

In Australia, about ten per cent of 12-month-old babies and 3 per cent of infants are allergic to peanuts.

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