

Plain text version: For the From Me And My Friends To You and Your's series: Allergies and Anaphylaxis

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How do allergies and anaphylaxis affect...

My body:

Anaphylaxis is life-threatening and can kill you very quickly if not treated. This means I have to be able to recognise very quickly if I'm having a reaction to something in my environment or something I have eaten. For example, only a few weeks ago I had an ice lolly – previously fine and safe for me – and I began to have a reaction. Normally for me it means I start to feel changes in my body, my heart rate changes, I can become very hot or cold, my face usually starts to swell and, worst case scenario, I collapse and struggle to breathe as my airway closes. I have various strategies to stop this getting to the point where I need an ambulance. As soon as I feel those changes – tingling in my face – I will take my meds or use my Epi-pen as they are always on me. I may also get into an ice cold shower to shock my body into returning to normal – however this something personal to me and I don't advocate that for anyone else. You have to find your own coping strategies working with medical professionals. If my strategies don't work, I need to be taken to intensive care very, very quickly.

My mood:

When you face a daily battle around your environment and what you eat or drink, it can be exhausting and sometimes it does affect how I feel. I sometimes get down because I shouldn't have to feel isolated or excluded due to a condition I cannot help. I get frustrated that I have to plan eating and cannot be spontaneous around food in the way that others can – it's one of the reasons I created my brand Creative Nature. Why shouldn't I be able to snack? I don't want to cook from scratch all of the time. The worst effect comes when I

suffer an episode of ignorant bullying from someone somewhere – this could be in a restaurant where I'm made to feel an inconvenience as I have to ask so many questions, when I'm asked to leave because I'm too much of a risk or on an airline where I'm refused or even shouted at when I've asked for an announcement to be made that no one eats nuts on a flight because someone with anaphylaxis and nut allergy is on board. This has happened to me more than once. I get angry because the pace of change is so slow – however I'm trying to do something about that by getting involved in campaigning on this issue.

My life:

My allergies are not all of who I am – yet they impact many areas of my life. I have to consider what I eat wherever I am and whoever I'm with. This means having to ask questions – or even take my own food – to parties or to meals with other people – and I have to ensure that others in the room are not eating foods which trigger my allergies too. Events where food is central can also be difficult for me – think about Christmas, Easter and Halloween for example. My favourite is Halloween however I cannot just eat anyone's homemade biscuits, I often cannot even touch them. Over the years I developed personal strategies for dealing with this by having up front conversations, offering to bring my own food – or quite literally my own Creative Nature snacks – and basically planning ahead. I even have to think carefully about planning eating while travelling and if on holiday overseas, this often means calling ahead so that any hotel or accommodation is ready to cope with someone like me. However what some business owners miss is the fact that when I feel safe and have a good experience, I can become one of the most loyal customers!

3 Ways A Friend Can Help:

1. By understanding my condition and how it affects me. Good friends can then often check labelling for me, ensure they buy foods which are safe for us all to eat so that we eat the same thing and I don't feel excluded.

2. By having some of those upfront conversations on my behalf – if we're having a meal out together or going to a party, they will ask lots of questions to ensure, as far as they can, that I'll be safe. Good friends soon do that without even thinking about it.
3. Understanding what my body does when anaphylaxis begins. This is literally about saving my life. Noticing if my skin has changed, if swelling has started, if I'm acting rather oddly and they know my care routine. They know where my Epi-pen is and they know the point at which an ambulance needs to be called. In other words they know my 'care plan' and they help me to implement it in case I'm unable to do that myself.

A Friend's Perspective – Polly

To be honest, I was extremely uneducated on allergies before I met Julianne – I don't have allergies myself and I also didn't have any friends (prior to meeting Julianne) that had allergies. I was more aware of gluten and dairy allergies but not the more severe ones like nuts and sesame.

I'm very well educated now. Even though I don't suffer from any allergies myself, I still have my role to play in keeping others safe that do. Allergies are so much more serious than I previously thought, and most can be life threatening.

I've seen Julianne affected by her allergies many times. Once we were on our way to a meeting with a well known supermarket and Julianne had an allergic reaction, she didn't have to administer her Epi-Pen so it wasn't too severe but it just shows that a reaction can come on at any time. Most the time you can't even pinpoint what Julianne ate or touched that caused the reaction! I had to keep as calm as possible however I was panicking too! Seeing reactions like this just makes you realise how hard living with an allergy must be, you must constantly be on edge.

Now, I'm always careful not bring into the office any of the foods that Julianne has a severe allergy to, to ensure the workspace is as clean and allergen safe as it can be. Absolutely no nuts, ever!

Education is key when it comes to allergies, the more people know about the severity of certain allergens the safer those with allergies will be. There have been so many horrible incidents (especially in schools) where children and even teenagers don't believe that certain foods can actually kill someone and have thrown these foods at other children thinking nothing will happen! There needs to be a focus on educating people on the more severe allergens e.g. tree nuts, peanuts and sesame

About the Author:

Julianne Ponan is the young CEO of free-from snack brand Creative Nature which produces products including bars, baking mixes, sweet treats and superfoods which are all free from the top 14 allergens, delicious in taste and nutritious. They are also vegan friendly. When she took over the company at the age of 22, she re-designed it to create products for people like her – and you. Julianne has anaphylaxis and is allergic to all nuts, sesame seeds, chickpeas and much more She can even be triggered by strong smells and perfumes.

Polly George is a close friend of Julianne, they met when the 24-year-old joined Creative Nature as an apprentice.

Get involved:

We would love to get as many people involved in creating these resources as possible! If you are a young person living with a chronic illness, disability, or long term health condition, and would be interested in making a similar resource based on YOUR experiences, we would love to hear from you! You can email us at thelunaproject@gmail.com or find us on social media @thelunaprojectuk.