

How Alanna Is Thriving One Year After Anaphylaxis



The Day Everything Changed: Anaphylaxis in the Supermarket Leads Mom to KFA

Christen's story is one that every parent of a child with food allergies can relate to. One day everything was fine. The next day, her little girl, Alanna, experienced an allergic reaction so severe it was life-threatening. And, as Christen explains, "from that day on, my life, her life—the life we had known before— changed forever."

The family's entry into the food allergy world started the day before the first day of school. Alanna was heading into first grade, and her brother, Darren, was starting kindergarten. Christen and the kids were at the samples counter at the local grocery store.

"The cook asked if we were allergic to nuts," Christen relates. "I didn't hesitate to say, 'No, none of us are.' In fact, Alanna doesn't even like nuts!" They each took a small plate of pasta with pesto sauce.

Less than 10 minutes later, Alanna vomited in the store. Five minutes after that, Alanna said, "Mom, my tongue feels funny. It feels scratchy." Christen looked in her mouth, but saw nothing. "Yet," Christen says, "I quickly went from being 'mom' to 'nurse practitioner' (my profession), and thought maybe she was reacting to the food.

"I kept asking Alanna how she felt. She kept saying she was okay ... until she vomited again."

Christen decided that Alanna needed medical attention. Seconds later, Alanna's entire body was covered in welts and a red rash. "That's when I panicked," Christen remembers. "I screamed to my husband, and then Alanna said, 'Mom, my voice is leaving.' I still get tears thinking about this. I know this was her way of telling me she was losing her ability to breathe." Thankfully, the urgent care facility was just minutes away.

Even so, by the time they arrived, Alanna was limp. She was taken straight in and given oxygen, epinephrine and antihistamine.

Epinephrine (ep-uh-NEF-rin) is the medicine used to treat anaphylaxis (anna-fih-LACK-sis). Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction.

One moment trying food samples at a grocery store changed everything for 7-year-old Alanna and her family.

When Alanna was stable, the doctor began a conversation with Christen and her husband that changed their lives. He explained that Alanna had reacted to the tree nuts often found in pesto sauce. She would always need to carry epinephrine auto-injectors in case another reaction occurred.

And he said more, but Christen was so overwhelmed that she hardly heard it. “Despite all my medical knowledge,” she admits, “I was not a nurse practitioner in that moment. I was just a mom who had realized that in an instant my little girl’s life had changed forever.”

After a few hours, the family was sent home with an epinephrine auto-injector and a food allergy action plan. “I just couldn’t stop crying,” Christen says. “But Alanna—being who she is—said, ‘Mom, I am going to be fine. Can I still go to school tomorrow?’”

The next day Christen decided that yes, it would be OK to take Alanna to school. Their first stop was the school nurse’s office, where there were forms to fill out and questions to answer. It was all so overwhelming that Christen’s tears began to flow again.

That afternoon, Christen and her husband decided they needed to be sure Alanna understood that her food allergy could be fatal. “This was one of the hardest conversations I’ve ever had with her,” Christen observes.

Today, Alanna is thriving thanks to the resources from Kids With Food Allergies. Soon thereafter, Christen says, “‘Operation Education’ began with a vengeance.” Kids With Food Allergies (KFA) was a big help in this area.

Christen began reading the blogs and articles on KFA’s website. “I don’t know anyone else whose child has such severe food allergies,” Christen shares. “To hear other stories and see what other moms had experienced was so helpful. It helped me feel that we were not alone. Plus, KFA offers great support. It enables me to stay abreast of new things happening in the food allergy world, including safety issues.”

Today, Christen is still fearful, but her comfort level is rising. It took months of learning to read labels, teaching friends and family members what to do, and ensuring school was safe before Christen’s confidence grew. “I finally began to feel some sense of comfort and believe that we were going to be OK,” she states.

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