

# Could Your Mindset Affect How Well A Treatment Works?

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Anxiety about side effects can keep people from starting or sticking to drug regimens or medical procedures. A group of researchers at Stanford wanted to find out if a simple mindset shift could help patients tolerate an uncomfortable treatment. They learned that when physicians make the effort to reframe potentially unpleasant symptoms in a positive light, it helped patients stay calm and persevere.

The researchers studied this approach with a group of families who, in a desperate search for relief from food allergies, signed their children up for a study testing [the investigational treatment known as oral immunotherapy](#). Several studies show promising results for this treatment, which requires patients to eat gradually increasing amounts of the trigger food every day for months in order to teach the immune system to tolerate it.

The procedure is safe if done with medical supervision, but many people experience unpleasant — and very occasionally life-threatening — allergic symptoms. So it can cause considerable stress.

Getting her 8-year-old to make the mental switch from, “No, no, you can never eat this’ to ‘Mommy really needs you to eat this’ was terrifying,” recalls Jessika Welcome, whose two daughters were diagnosed with peanut allergies as toddlers. The San Francisco Bay Area mother first fed her younger daughter the trigger food — a trace of peanut flour mixed into applesauce — when she entered a research study at Stanford University in early 2017.

Welcome thought the study was testing the effectiveness of the food allergy treatment. In fact, it was designed by psychologists who wanted to see if shifting the way patients view side effects could ease anxiety and improve the treatment experience.