Alice Hoyt  0:03
Pam, what's a challenge that you guys had to overcome regarding food allergy?

Pam Lestage  0:09
It's very easy to kind of go into that little spiral of "what could I do better? What if we have given her this before? What if I had had me this?" And that was a huge challenge that as, not necessarily as a family but as parents, we had to overcome. And just kind of know that this, this is just her journey. Not that God gave her this, that God has a plan for her in all of this and a plan for us in all of this.

Announcer  0:39
Welcome to food allergy and your kiddo with Dr. Alice Hoyt, the podcast about demystifying food allergies, diminishing allergy anxiety, and taking back control. Let's navigate this challenge together with evidence based information, scientific research and tried and proven practices. And now here Your host, board certified allergist and immunologist specializing in food allergy. Dr. Alice Hoyt.

Alice Hoyt  1:07
Hey y'all. Welcome to today's episode. I'm Dr. Alice Hoyt. And today I'm very excited to have a very special guest Mrs. Pamela Lestage with us. Pam and I go back decades, so she and I were friends before she was a food allergy mama. And before I was an allergist, it's really amazing how God places people in our lives, not just for current season, but sometimes for future seasons too. Pam and her family are in a season right now in which her two kiddos are getting older. And her daughter who is a tween has food allergy. So what we're going to talk about today are some of the challenges that she and her family face regarding food allergy. And as you're listening, I think you're going to hear some familiar themes. At the end of today's episode, I hope you check out the show notes and the accompanying infoblog to access the downloadable Food Allergy Mamas Guide to Overcoming Challenges. This quick tactical tool will help you plan out how to first identify and then overcome some of those hurdles that are stealing some of the joy out of your life. We can't have stealing of joy, y'all. So let's chat with Pam, and I'll catch you at the end of the interview.

Hey, Pam, welcome to the Food Allergy and Your Kiddo podcast. I'm so happy to have you here with me today.

Pam Lestage  2:28
Thank you so much, Dr. Hoyt. I appreciate it. It's a pleasure.

Alice Hoyt  2:32
Absolutely. So let's dive right in. How did you get started on your food allergy journey.

Pam Lestage  2:38
My daughter is 11 or she will be 11 in August. And basically when we had her we had a pediatrician that we absolutely loved. He was amazing. And so anything that he said we did. So
when it was time to start her on solid foods, and of course we went to him and we asked Okay, what are we need to do? You know, tell us we had no idea. She's our first child. So we were very much first time parents. So, you know, he basically told us kind of the gist of it Peter greens before you feed her fruits because fruits are, you know, sweeter and she you know may not want to eat the greens after she eats the fruits, you know all those kinds of things. any mention of food allergies that I can recall are very slim, basically it was always have Benadryl next to you wait three days before me introduce something new in case there's a reaction. You won't get them confused. There was a small mention of strawberries, eggs and just wait until she's one to have dairy. And that was it. There wasn't any talk of epinephrine. There wasn't any talk of pain. He kind of just gave us the basic schedule. So he asked us to wait for strawberries until like six months old honey until she's one. He did tell us peanuts at two. And that was that, you know, we kind of took it for what he said and and we went with it. We every time we introduced a food, we watched her. And then we went and we just kind of follow the schedule. So kind of fast forward in her little life. I feel like I kind of had a little bit of mommy intuition. Because there were two instances in particular that I can remember where someone said my child something or are asked to and I was very upset. The first was when she was about 10 months old, and she excuse me, and she we were at a beach vacation. We were celebrating all of our anniversaries with our families because we were with my husband's family. My husband just graduated from dental school. So We had a cake and it was a grand celebration. Well, it was an almond cake. And I remember them asking me if I wanted her to have a piece. And I said, No, you know, she's not allowed to have that. Well, my brother in law took a pie piece and put it in her mouth. And I remember being so upset because she had yet been introduced to x because we were told to wait until about a year, she'd never had nuts. And in the back of my mind, it wasn't that I thought she would have a reaction. It's just that that we weren't told to do that yet. So that was that experience. And then the second experience was actually right before she turned to we were on vacation again with the same family. And they were feeding my pink, my niece, a peanut butter sand which, and she's about nine months younger than my daughter. And they asked for someone at one and I looked at my husband and I said, I mean, it's about time, you know, maybe maybe she should have one. And as we were going to go prep it. something in me stopped and said, You know what, I don't know where the hospital is here. I don't have any Benadryl here. So let's just hold off. Who says that? Right? No, like, I don't know, I just feel like looking back, that was just sort of my intuition. And God telling me hold off. This is not the right place to do this.

Alice Hoyt  6:12
That was before there was any thought of allergy. Is that right? Yeah. And you don't have a lot of allergy in your family. You just had that mom tuition.

Pam Lestage  6:22
Yeah, absolutely. And it wasn't that she couldn't. It's just that my doctor said, we need to hold off. And so in my mind back then that's why I was holding off. But But now looking back, I know it was a little bit. It was a little bit of God, you know, telling me otherwise. And so when she all she was about to turn to, this is where the journey started. I had just had my son, they're almost two years apart. So right after we brought him home about a week into having him
home, my husband said, You know what? It's time. You know, she's almost peanut butter, what's his favorite food. So he made her peanut butter and jelly sandwich. And I remember telling him, she's never gonna eat that. Like, that's not how you introduce peanut butter that's just, it's too sticky. It's too icky. And he wish he wanted to give it to her, and she refused to eat it. I took it as it was just not the right texture for her. So a couple of days later, my mom comes over. It's important to note that I was not clear to drive yet. I had had a C section and I couldn't drive. So my mom was over and she was helping me. And I asked Kirsten, who was very, very verbal, at two years old. Do you want to try crackers with some peanut butter? And she said, Sure, so we sat her down and put some Ritz crackers with some peanut butter on a little tray for her and asked her to take a bite. And so she took a bite and kind of spit it out and said it was spicy in retrospect, I know what that means. But at the time, everything was spicy to her. a doughnut was spicy to her. Her favorite drink if it was too cold, spicy to her, you know, that was just sort of the term of the day. Um, I now know that that was her way of telling me something was wrong. Um, so she spits it out. Then she takes the cracker and takes her finger and takes the peanut butter off the cracker and puts it on the plate, then tries to eat the cracker and says, I'm not hungry, puts it down. I wipe her little hands and walks away. And that was that because in my mind, an allergic reaction happened almost immediately. I didn't you know, I didn't know that. There were other signs. And so she went off to play I sat down on the dining with my mom. I was holding the baby. And something in me just said go check on her. And so I She was playing in her little room and I went to her room and I called her out and as she came out, and I saw her face, she had seven walks in her face. And you something wasn't right. So I immediately went to get them in a drill. I did not panic, which is rare for me. But I immediately went to get the Benadryl and I gave her Benadryl and my dad happens to be a family physician. So I called him and I said, Pearson's having an allergic reaction to peanuts. Again, looking back, I didn't know what an allergic reaction was. So I was just very calm. I took it as she's going to have, well, she's going to get a rash and we'll be fine. Um, and he said, she needs to come to my office right away. And I said, Okay, sure. Mom's going to take her again, I didn't realize like, the severity that it could have gone to. And we're very blessed that all she had was a seven welts on her face and they were in places where she touched herself after. So she goes to my dad's office. With my mom and she stays there for about an hour and a half, you know, kept sending me messages. You know, She's good. She's playing, you know she's to, um, then she comes back home. She's a little sleepy from the Benadryl we take a nap. And that was that. That was that. A few weeks later, we went to the pediatrician for her well, checkup. And when I tell you Dr. Hoyt that I mentioned it as like a passing statement. That's all I did. I just said, oh, by the way, she had peanuts, and we think she's allergic. And that was that, like, I had no idea what that truly meant. So the pediatrician wrote me a script,

Alice Hoyt  10:41
A prescription for epinephrine?

Pam Lestage  10:43
Yes. She gave me a prescription for it. And that friend told me to not feed her peanuts and that at three years old, we would do a food challenge. So it okay and it's it's important to note that she this was a new pediatrician. We didn't know her well. Get she was the only one we live in a
very small town. She was the only one here at the time. And so that's we went to she brought me a script sent me home. She told me not to give her peanuts again. That's it. That's all we did.

Alice Hoyt  11:14
Did you get that epinephrine prescription?

Pam Lestage  11:16
I did. We did. We got it filled right away. And at that moment, I knew that I had to figure out what it meant to do allergy. Did anybody show you how to use it? No, nobody showed me anything. She didn't say, Oh, you should go to an allergist shouldn't see any of that. So I went online, and my husband and I found everything we needed to find about peanut allergies, and we kind of equipted ourselves to handle it.

Alice Hoyt  11:48
What resources did you use online, Pam?

Pam Lestage  11:50
If I remember correctly, I think I just went to the food allergy website FARE. And I think it may have been called something else.

Alice Hoyt  11:59
FAACT.

Pam Lestage  12:00
Yeah. And so I went there and you know, I got cards and I read everything about it and, um, but yet it, it still didn't seem as as important as it later became, if that makes sense. So at three years old, we went to go get her checkup and at the appointment I said he wanted to do a free challenge. And she kind of backtracked and was like, oh, whoa, wait. We don't do that here. And I thought, Okay, so what do we need to do? And that's when she referred us to an allergist. And we went to the allergist right away and that's when that's when it became real. When he did the testing, when he did the blood work. When he gave us you know, pamphlets of information, and when I truly made it my mission to really know what it meant to have food allergy and Even though it happened to us three is when I can clearly pinpoint that that's when our lives changed.

Alice Hoyt  13:06
What happened at three, like was it the allergist having a very serious discussion? Was it you finding that information where, like, a light went off? Or was it more of a gradual between two and three that you're like, "Whoa, this is serious."

Pam Lestage  13:22
I mean, it was gradual.

Alice Hoyt  13:24
Uh huh.

Pam Lestage  13:25
I definitely knew serious. I mean, we had we sat everybody down, and we had talks. We don't have peanut butter around her. We don't touch her after we ate it. But even though I did research, I didn't do thorough research, if that makes sense. I read what I needed to read. And then I took it for what it was. later on. After three I made it my mission to know everything that an allergist knew without going to med school. I wanted to walk into every doctor's appointment that I had. anytime anyone asked me anything about an allergy and I wanted to be able to be on their level, I want as much as I could be I wanted to sit there and when he used terms that maybe a regular patient wouldn't understand. I wanted to know what that meant. And I wanted to go back at him with research that maybe I found and say, Well, look, I've read into this. At that point at three I became an advocate whereas it to I became a food allergy mom at three I became an advocate for her. And I think those are two different things because I think that there are a lot of food allergy parents and food allergy parents that I have. That I may not know personally but through the school system, you know, I've I've seen or I've spoken to that don't necessarily advocate for their kids and not be caring They don't want to because they don't know how. They just know, hey, she shouldn't eat this or he shouldn't eat that it's fine. They may not even have epi pens, which blows my mind. But maybe because they never went to an allergist. But at that point, I became an advocate. And like I said, I made it my mission to know everything I needed to know. We reset down everybody. And we really told them this is how life is going to be from now on. Not Oh, she might grow out of it, because it too, you know, I took the things that I read that oh, you know, kids grow out of allergies and things like that to say, Oh, well then show four out of this one, no big deal. Um, and then I found out that with peanuts, especially that's not necessarily the case. And I have to kind of note too, That this was nine years ago. And what we know now, and the resources available now like blogs or podcasts or even just research is so different than it was back then. And so yeah, that's kind of how it became. That's, that was kind of our journey to kind of finding out and then really becoming a new normal because it really became a new normal and now it's just our lives and it is what it is. And we don't know life before there was food allergy in our family. And I have to say that our families are extremely supportive. And we've never had to really ask twice to not do certain things to you know, put food's away. They just weren't brought in even now. I mean, still, all this all these years later, they read all the things that they don't know they call us. Um, it for us has been a positive journey.

Alice Hoyt  17:16
So Pam, what do you think has been you and your husband's biggest challenge regarding food allergy and your daughter?

Pam Lestage  17:23
I think that that changes as she grows. One that sticks with us, you know, and will stick with us throughout life is having people be understanding, rather than showing us a pity. It's hard to explain something to someone who isn't affected by it. with anything in life, it's hard to put yourself in someone else's shoes. But we don't want anyone to ever pity us to ever pity her. We
just asked for understanding and acceptance for her and I think that is a challenge because Because it's hard to educate some people, and we'll get comments like, oh, bless her heart, I would die if I couldn't eat peanuts. And that is just not a nice comment to make. And I don't think people make that comment out of malice. And it took a long time for me to know how to respond to that. Because, you know, when you hear that your initial reaction is kind of anger. You know, it's it's kind, it's annoyance, anger. And I learned a long time ago that when I feel that way, I don't respond. And then I just a light bulb kind of hit me and it seems very simple, but my response now is and it's kind of an a passive aggressive response, but it's well that she can die with it. And then that's when they look at me and say, Oh, right. And I know it's a little harsh, but I say it with a smile on my face. essay with kindness, my voice. And they kind of just, at that point, kind of understand where we stand. Um, that was a big challenge. I think that mom guilt, that guilt is a huge personal challenge that was very hard to overcome. Especially because with food allergies, it's not one of those things that you get a food allergy and they say, Oh, this is why she got it. We don't have that. So it's very easy to kind of go into that little spiral of what could I've done better? What if we had given her this before? What if I had had this? And that was a huge challenge that as not necessarily as a family that as parents we had to overcome and just kind of know that this this is just her journey. Not that God gave her this, but God has a plan for her and all of this and a plan for us in all of this.

Alice Hoyt  20:07
That was the first part of my interview with Pamela Lestage. And we'll have the rest of that interview in a later episode. The big takeaways that I really get from Pam's story, are one, see an allergist as soon as you're diagnosed or as soon as your kiddo is diagnosed with food allergy, or whenever you have a question of whether or not you have food allergy in your family. Ultimately, it's an allergist who will tell you whether or not it's an allergy that's present, or if it's an intolerance, and if it is a food intolerance, and the allergist can help get you to the right specialist. The second thing that I'm taking away from our interview today is really the importance of having solid evidence based resources regarding food allergy, evidence based for science, but we also want to have really good resources for navigating the school system for dealing with anxiety. Coming back to my number one takeaway from today's episode is seeing an allergist and having your allergist, be someone that you feel comfortable talking with and somebody who's going to be your top resource. The third thing I'm taking away from my chat with Pam today is not to blame yourself. I am regularly asked about pregnancy and what a lady can do when she's pregnant to prevent her kiddo from having a food allergy. And we don't have any evidence that there's something a woman can or cannot do to impact whether or not her child will have a food allergy. So don't blame yourself food allergy Mama's and food allergy Papa's there's nothing y'all could have done either. So you can check out a blog that I wrote about this exact topic at food allergy indicator calm, and I'll have that link in the show notes. Again, I'm very grateful to Pam for sharing her story and we'll hear more of her story. And later episodes, I know that there are challenges that you're facing regarding food allergy, I want to help you with those challenges. One way I can help is if you submit your questions to me so that I can answer them. And I can answer them in the podcast and in the info blog. Also, check out our downloadable food allergy moms guide to overcoming challenges. It'll help you plan out how to identify challenges that you're facing, and then very tactically address those challenges.
so you can overcome them. Awesome, right. In closing, thanks so much for joining me today. And remember, I am an allergist, but I am not your allergist. So do not take what I say as medical advice for you. Take it as education, and talk with your allergist about what you learn on this show. God bless you. God bless your family, and I'll see you in the next episode.

Announcer 22:51
Thanks for listening to this episode of Food Allergy and Your Kiddo with food allergist Dr. Alice Hoyt. For more information on navigating the world of food allergy visit www.foodallergyandyourkiddo.com and follow Dr. Hoyt on twitter @dralicehoyt. Remember to subscribe, rate and review. Let's take the anxiety and confusion out of food allergy.