

# Can we use a genogram to identify potential life threatening food allergies in a child?

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**Lisa Hold**

CEO &amp; Founder, AllerGear, Washington D.C. Metro Area, USA

**Correspondence:** Hold, CEO & Founder, AllerGear, Washington D.C. Metro Area, USA., Tel 5715998018, Email lhold@allergear.com**Received:** February 13, 2017 | **Published:** March 10, 2017

## Opinion

Murray Bowen developed a family genogram which organizes information about one's family into a useful diagram. The tool gives a pictorial snapshot of a generation to generation history. The process is more difficult than anticipated and validity of the test is questionable due to the reliability of the family history. If the content is accurate then administering a genogram can be insightful and a good foundation for determining the likelihood a child will develop food allergies. Genograms have proven to be a resourceful tool when diagnosing mental health disorders, genetic diseases and cancer. It gives the physician or therapist that snapshot of data compiled, to include several generations in a family system. Can we use a genogram to identify potential life threatening food allergies in a child?

I think we can. My son has life-threatening food allergies that has devastated our lives...we almost lost him several times! It isn't just a little inconvenience either; it has caused extreme anxiety and eating disordered behavior. The stories I could share when he had anaphylactic reactions would bring anyone to tears. At any rate, I am allergic to penicillin and shrimp and my son's father is allergic to peanuts. I always avoided penicillin and shrimp, but never carried an EpiPen and my son's father was not aware of his allergy until two years ago, when he tested positive. He was told not to eliminate peanuts from his diet but after we researched the unpredictability of food allergies he elected to avoid them. In addition, my mother is severely allergic to aspirin and shrimp. She nearly died herself after ingesting aspirin in her early twenties... after years of using them as pain relievers. As you can see, there is a pattern here that if a genogram had been utilized we may have been able to avoid my son's near loss of life. There are three generations with food allergies on my side of the family alone: my mom, myself, my son.

Until researchers are able to develop a method to greatly reduce the likelihood of anaphylaxis to occur a genogram can be used to manage potential life threatening allergies. The genogram can be used as a tool to understand causative factors for the role of food allergies within the family system.

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