What is a food challenge?
A food challenge is a test to see if a child is allergic to a food. It is done after a skin prick and blood test if it is still not clear what your child is allergic to. Or it may be done to see if your child has grown out of an allergy. You must stop any antihistamine medicine 4 days before the test. It is done in hospital if a past reaction was very bad or caused asthma. It is safer to do it more than 6 months after the last reaction. In the test a small amount of the food is put in the mouth. More and more of the food is slowly given over a few hours. Your child is watched closely. Rarely, children stay overnight. If there is a bad reaction in hospital, it will be easy to treat your child. The test is very safe, but there is a small risk of a bad reaction.

What is a reaction?
There can be many things. A red lumpy itchy rash, dry itchy skin or swelling of the lips, face, neck or body. Shortness of breath, noisy breathing and cough. Tummy pain, vomiting, diarrhoea, irritability or poor growth. Children often have only a few of these. The reaction can come on fast in minutes or hours, or slowly over many hours or days. It can be mild or severe. Very rarely, older children can collapse.

What if my child is ill before the test?
It is best to do the test on another day if your child is ill on the day or day before the test. Things like a cold, flu, vomiting, diarrhoea, a fever or worse asthma. Please ring the ward 01623 622515 extension 3063.

What happens after the test?
If there is a reaction on the ward your child may need to stay overnight. If there has been a mild reaction your doctor may ask you to give medicine for 1 to 3 days. In most cases this is an antihistamine and sometimes prednisolone. If there is no reaction you may be given this medicine to take home, in case of a reaction later. After you have gone home you need to watch your child carefully for the next few hours. Keep them with you for the next day. This is in case of a late reaction. Don't try another new food for at least a week. Then any late reaction can be seen. If there is no reaction after the test, you can give the food to your child.

What needs to be done if there is a reaction at home?
Don't give any more of the new food. For a mild reaction give the medicine you have taken home. Often this is an antihistamine and sometimes prednisolone. Talk to your doctor. If things slowly get worse or you are worried, talk to a doctor as soon as you can. For a bad reaction use your epinephrine (adrenaline) pen injector if you have one. Call 999. Try not to leave your child alone. Bring them to the telephone if you can.

You can get further information from:
King’s Mill Hospital
Patient Advice and liaison Services
(PALS) on 01623 672222

Newark Hospital
Patient Advice and Liaison Services
(PALS) on 01623 685692