



May 12, 2016

Don Nash  
Executive Producer  
NBC News TODAY  
30 Rockefeller Plaza  
New York, NY 10112

Dear Mr. Nash:

On behalf of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) and the more than 15 million Americans living with food allergies, I am writing with some concerns about a recent broadcast on the Today Show entitled “Coming Out of Their Shells.” The segment featured Matt Lauer and Al Roker as they searched for the world’s largest pistachio. In the episode, they make light of and even laugh at nut allergies. They laugh at a written warning about the presence of nuts and joke that “if you have a nut allergy, you are in the wrong place!” Mr. Lauer continues to joke, saying, “Oops! I have a nut allergy!” It concludes with Mr. Roker shouting “EpiPen me!” with peals of laughter from both men.

AAFA ([www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org) and [www.kidswithfoodallergies.org](http://www.kidswithfoodallergies.org)), a not-for-profit organization founded in 1953, is the leading patient organization for people with asthma and allergies, and the oldest asthma and allergy patient group in the world. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 50 million Americans have allergies.<sup>i</sup> There is no cure for food allergies. Living with food allergy can have negative effects on the quality of life of patients and their families because they need to remain vigilant about accidental exposures.<sup>ii</sup> The National Academy of Medicine (NAM) has a project underway to examine critical issues related to food allergy (FA), including the prevalence and severity of FA and its impact on affected individuals, families, and communities; and current understanding of FA as a disease, and in diagnostics, treatments, prevention, and public policy.<sup>iii</sup>

It is extremely important that people with a nut allergy avoid the presence of nuts and nut products, as contact with their allergen can cause a life-threatening allergic reaction. People with a nut allergy face challenges every day, especially in places where nuts may be present. Warning labels are an important and necessary means of keeping them safe.

During a reaction, patients require the life-saving drug epinephrine and must go to the nearest hospital for follow-up treatment. The very real fear and anxiety that people experience during an allergic reaction (often referred to as an impending sense of doom) is a serious matter. Making light of this condition hurts our members because it encourages the public not to take the risk of allergic reactions seriously, and this cavalier attitude may make them act in ways that could put an allergic person in danger.

We would welcome the opportunity to educate your network and the cast about the realities of nut and other food allergies so that they and your viewing audience can better understand and recognize the gravity of the disease. We strongly urge you to refrain from this type of programming in the future.



Asthma and Allergy  
Foundation of America

We are available to discuss further. Please feel free to contact me at [csennett@aafa.org](mailto:csennett@aafa.org), or Meryl Bloomrosen, AAFA's Vice President, Policy, Advocacy and Research at [mbloomrosen@aafa.org](mailto:mbloomrosen@aafa.org).

Regards,

Cary Sennett, MD, PhD  
President and CEO  
The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

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<sup>i</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Allergies. Available at:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/toolstemplates/entertainment/tips/allergies.html> Published 2011. Accessed May 11, 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/foodAllergy/Pages/WhyResearchFoodAllergy.aspx>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/Activities/Nutrition/FoodAllergies.aspx#sthash.V46yuiLk.dpuf>