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Suicide attempt by food anaphylaxis – Case report

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Background: Anaphylaxis is a severe, potentially life-threatening systemic hypersensitivity reaction, being a medical emergency. Trigger identification, patient education and establishing emergency action plans are essential steps in the management of this condition. However, in rare cases, patients deliberately expose themselves to the trigger to attempt self-harm.

Report: We report a case of a 39-year-old woman, with a history of multiple sclerosis, borderline personality disorder, depression (with 10 previous emergency department visits with suicidal thoughts) and documented hypersensitivity to nuts and fresh fruits (rosaceae). Following a fifth discharge from a Psychiatric Department, she stopped taking her psychiatric medication, had a worsening of her depression and ingested peach juice as a suicide attempt. Within minutes, she developed generalized pruritus, hand edema, wheezing and desaturation. She was rushed to the Emergency Department where she was promptly medicated with im adrenaline, iv corticosteroids, iv anti-histamines and inhaled bronchodilators, which stabilized the patient and reversed the anaphylactic reaction. In the emergency room she confessed she had taken the juice as a suicide attempt.

During the first three days she remained dependent on oxygen and inhaled bronchodilators to prevent desaturation. On the seventh day, completely recovered from her anaphylaxis, she was transferred to the Psychiatric Department for further treatment.

Clinical Relevance of Report: Food allergens account for a large part of anaphylaxis triggers. However, their intentional use is very uncommon. Suicide attempts by means of anaphylaxis are rare; however, they occur and should be documented. This documentation is essential, so the true prevalence of the problem can be known. Immunoallergologists and Psychiatrists following patients with depression and a history of anaphylactic reaction should be aware of this possibility and have a more stringent follow-up.