

Allergy and Asthma CENTER OF MINNESOTA

FOOD ALLERGY

What is Food Allergy?

A food allergy is an abnormal response of the body to a certain food. It is important to know that this is different than a food intolerance, which does not affect the immune system, although some of the symptoms may be present.

What Cause Food Allergy?

Before having a food allergy reaction, a sensitive person must have been exposed to the food at least once before; a child could also be exposed through breast milk. It is the second time a person eats the food that the allergic symptoms happen. At that time, when the IgE antibodies react with the food, histamines are released, which can cause hives, asthma, itching of the mouth, trouble breathing, stomach pains, vomiting, and/or diarrhea.

What is the Difference Between Food Allergy and Food Intolerance?

Food allergy causes an immune system response, causing symptoms in your child that range from uncomfortable to life threatening. Food intolerance does not affect the immune system, although some symptoms may be the same as in food allergy.

What Foods Most Often Cause Food Allergy?

Approximately 90 percent of all food allergies are caused by the following eight foods:

- Milk
- Eggs
- Wheat
- Soy
- Tree nuts
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Peanuts

Eggs, milk, and peanuts are the most common causes of food allergies in children, with wheat, soy, and tree nuts also included. Peanuts, tree nuts, fish, and shellfish commonly cause the most severe reactions. Nearly 3 percent of children have food allergies. Although most children “outgrow” their allergies, allergy to peanut, tree nuts, and shellfish may be lifelong.

What are the Symptoms of Food Allergy?

Allergic symptoms may begin within minutes to an hour after ingesting the food. The following are the most common symptoms of food allergy. However, each person may experience symptoms differently. Symptoms may include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Cramps
- Hives
- Swelling
- Eczema
- Itching or swelling of the lips, tongue, or mouth
- Itching or tightness of the throat
- Difficulty breathing
- Wheezing
- Lowered blood pressure

According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, it does not take much of the food to cause a severe reaction in highly allergic people. In fact, as little as 1/44,000 of a peanut kernel can cause an allergic reaction for severely allergic individuals. The symptoms of food allergy may resemble other problems or medical conditions.

Treatment for Food Allergy:

There is no medication to prevent food allergy. The goal of treatment is to avoid the foods that cause the symptoms. After seeing your physician and finding which foods you are allergic to, it is very important to avoid these foods and other similar foods in that food group. If you are breastfeeding your child, it is important to avoid foods in your diet that your child is allergic to. Small amounts of the food allergen may be transmitted to your child through your breast milk and cause a reaction.

It is also important to give vitamins and minerals to your child he/she is unable to eat certain foods. Discuss this with your physician.

For children who have had a severe food reaction a prescription for an Epi-pen is highly recommended. This medicine helps to stop the symptoms of severe reactions.

Many allergies may be short term in children and the food may be tolerated after the age of 3 or 4. Discuss retesting or trying foods again with your physician.

Milk and Soy Allergy:

Allergies to milk and soy are usually seen in infants and young children. Often, these symptoms are unlike the symptoms of other allergies, but, rather, may include the following:

- Colic (fussy baby)
- Blood in your child's stool
- Poor growth

Often, your child's physician will change your baby's formula to soy formula or breast milk if it is thought he/she is allergic to milk. If your child has problems with soy formula, your child's physician might change him/her to an easily digested hypoallergenic formula. The symptoms of milk or soy formula may resemble other problems or medical conditions.

Prevention of Food Allergies:

The development of food allergies cannot be prevented, but can often be delayed in infants by following these recommendations:

- If possible, breastfeed your infant for the first 6 months
- Do not give solid foods until your child is 6 months of age or older
- Avoid cow's milk, wheat, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, and fish during your child's first year of life.
- Do not rely on someone's word that a food is "safe" to eat

PEANUT ALLERGY DIET

General Guidelines for Peanut Allergy:

The key to an allergy-free diet is to avoid the food and products containing the foods you are allergic to. The items that you are allergic to are called allergens.

A peanut allergy is an abnormal response of the body to the proteins found in peanuts. In order to avoid foods that contain peanuts, it is important to read food labels. Peanuts are actually legumes, from the same family as soy, lentils, and peas. Some people can therefore be allergic to these other foods, although most peanut allergic people can eat other foods with safety. Peanuts are very different from tree nuts. But because there can be cross contamination in “mixed nuts” and in increased risk of other food allergies in peanut allergic people, it is advised to avoid all nuts if you are peanut allergic.

How to Read a Label for a Peanut-Free Diet:

Be sure to avoid foods that contain any of the following ingredients:

- Cold pressed, expressed, or expelled peanut oil
- Ground nuts/Mixed nuts
- Nu-Nuts™ artificial nuts
- Peanuts
- Peanut butter
- Peanut flour

Foods that may indicate the presence of peanut protein include:

- African, Chinese, Thai, Indonesian, Mexican, or other ethnic dishes
- Baked goods
- Candy
- Cereals
- Chili, spaghetti sauce
- Chocolate (candy, candy bars)
- Crackers
- Eggs rolls
- Hydrolyzed plant protein
- Hydrolyzed vegetable protein
- Ice creams, frozen yogurts
- Marzipan
- Nougat
- Sunflower seeds may be produced on equipment shared with peanuts

Other possible sources of peanuts or peanut products:

- Avoid cold pressed, expressed, or expelled peanut oil.
- Arachis oil is peanut oil.
- Peanuts are very allergenic and can cause fatal reactions.
- Ethnic foods, commercially prepared baked goods, and candy can be cross contaminated with peanuts, since peanuts are frequently used in these types of foods.
- Peanut butter and/or peanut flour have been shown to be used in homemade chili and spaghetti sauce as thickeners.
- Hydrolyzed plant and vegetable protein may be peanut in imported foods, but is typically soy in foods from the US. Contact the manufacturer for more information.
- Nu-Nut™ artificial nuts are peanuts that have been deflavored and reflavored with a nut such as pecan or walnut.

TREE NUT ALLERGY DIET

General Guidelines for Tree Nut Allergy:

The key to an allergy-free diet is to avoid the foods or products containing the food you are allergic to. The items that you are allergic to are called allergens.

How to Read a Label for a Tree Nut-Free Diet:

Be sure to avoid foods that contain any of the following ingredients:

- Almonds
- Artificial nuts
- Brazil nuts
- Caponata
- Cashews
- Chestnuts
- Filberts
- Hazelnuts
- Gianduja (a nut mixture in some chocolate)
- Hickory nuts
- Macadamia nuts
- Mandelonas (peanuts soaked in almond flavoring)
- Marzipan/almond paste
- Natural nut extracts
- Nougat
- Nu-Nuts™ artificial nuts
- Nut butters (cashew butter, almond butter)
- Nut meal
- Nut oil
- Nut paste
- Nut pieces
- Pecans
- Pesto
- Pine nuts (pignolia, pinion, pinyon nuts)
- Pistachios
- Pralines
- Walnuts (Black, English)

To avoid tree-nuts:

- Nu-Nuts™ artificial nuts are peanuts that have been decaffeinated and recaffeinated with a nut such as pecan or walnut
- Filberts are hazelnuts
- Avoid natural extracts such as pure almond extract and natural wintergreen extract (for filbert/hazelnut allergies)
- Use imitation or artificially flavored extracts
- Ethnic foods, commercially prepared baked goods, and candy can be cross contaminated with nuts since nuts are frequently used in these types of foods
- Tree nuts are being added to an increasing variety of foods such as barbecue sauces, cereals, crackers, and ice creams
- Hacky sacks, beanbags, and draft dodgers are sometimes filled with crushed nutshells
- Nutmeg and coconut are usually safe to eat. They come from the seeds of a tropical tree and are not actually tree nuts
- Mortadella may contain pistachios