

What should I do if I believe I have an adverse reaction to a certain food?

You should see a board-certified allergist to get a diagnosis. An allergist and dietitian can best help the food-allergic patient manage diet issues with little sacrifice to nutrition or the pleasure of eating.

Making a diagnosis may include

- a thorough medical history;
- the analysis of a food diary; and
- several tests including skin-prick tests, RAST tests (blood test) and food challenges (using different foods to test for allergic reactions).



Once a diagnosis is complete, an allergist will help set up an action plan to manage allergic reactions that may occur. An action plan may include taking medication by injection to control allergic reactions. Information on how to avoid the food(s) should also be provided.

Reading food labels for all foods is important to effectively manage true food allergies.

What important information should I know and share with my family and friends?

Because food allergy can be life threatening, the allergy-producing food must be completely avoided. If you, or someone else, are experiencing a severe food allergic reaction, call 911 (or an ambulance) immediately.



Most life-threatening allergic reactions to foods occur when eating away from the home. It is important to explain your situation and needs clearly to your host or food server. If necessary, ask to speak with the chef or manager. Some foods have been reported to cause reactions when inhaled, as with the steam from poached fish or boiling crab pots. It is

very important to know about how cross-contact of foods can occur in a restaurant, bakery, or home in order to safeguard yourself. An allergist and the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network can help you.



The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA), a law implemented in January 2006, requires allergens to be listed on food labels in easily understood language. Always look at the listings on labels to determine the presence of the eight major allergens. Since food and beverage manufacturers are continually making improvements, food-allergic persons should read the food label for every product purchased, each time it is purchased.

Many different foods can cause food allergic reactions. However, most reactions to foods are not food allergies but some type of food intolerance.

Food sensitivities may be a

- Food allergy
- OR
- Food intolerance

The eight most common food allergens are milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish, and crustacean shellfish.

If you, or someone else, are having a serious allergic reaction to a food...

CALL 911! (or call an ambulance) immediately.



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Background on Food Allergies & Asthma
Food Allergy Poster for Food Service Workers
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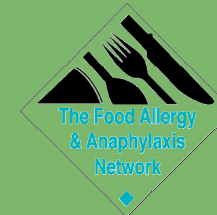


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Understanding Food Allergy



Allergies affect the lives of millions of people around the world.

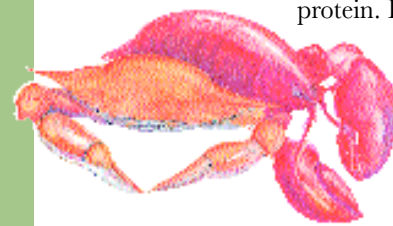
Fresh spring flowers, a friend's cat or dog, even the presence of dust can make people itch, sneeze and scratch almost uncontrollably. But what about that seemingly innocent peanut butter sandwich, glass of milk or fish fillet?

A growing number of Americans have an allergy to these or other foods. Food allergies can be life threatening. Knowledge about food allergies can help save a life.



What is a food allergy?

Food allergy is a reaction of the body's immune system to something in a food or an ingredient in a food—usually a protein. It can be a serious condition and should be diagnosed by a board-certified allergist. A true food allergy (also called “food hypersensitivity”) and its symptoms can take many forms.



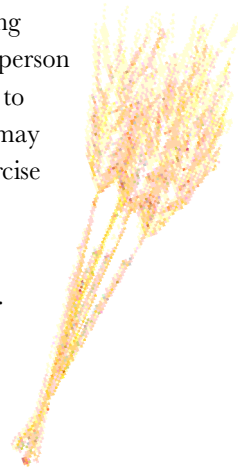
Which foods cause food allergy?

The eight most common food allergens—milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish and crustacean shellfish—cause most food allergic reactions. However, many other foods have been identified as allergens for some people, such as certain fruits or vegetables and seeds. Most children with food allergies to milk, eggs, soy, and wheat will outgrow their allergy. However, allergy to peanuts, tree nuts and fish usually persists. Shellfish allergies often develop during later childhood or adulthood, and the most common food allergy among adults is shellfish. Peanuts and tree nuts account for most of the severe cases of food allergy.

What are the symptoms of food allergy?

Symptoms of food allergy differ greatly among individuals. They can also differ in the same person during different exposures. Allergic reactions to food can vary in severity, time of onset, and may be affected by when the food was eaten. Exercise can also be a factor.

Some food allergies affect only the gastrointestinal tract (stomach and intestines). These are often infant or early childhood conditions, but some can persist. Celiac disease is sometimes considered a food allergy because it is the result of an adverse immune response to gluten, a protein in wheat, barley and certain other grains. However, unlike some childhood food allergies, which are sometimes outgrown,



Celiac disease stays with you through your lifetime. This condition is also diagnosed in adults – in fact, the most common age at diagnosis now is about 40, and most patients have had at least 10 years of symptoms before diagnosis.

Common symptoms of food allergy include skin irritations such as rashes, hives and eczema, and gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea and vomiting. Sneezing, runny nose and shortness of breath can also result from food allergy, but such symptoms are usually seen at the same time as symptoms in other areas of the body in a more severe reaction. In other words, isolated sneezing and runny nose, or isolated shortness of breath is not common with food allergy. Some individuals may experience a more severe reaction called anaphylaxis.

What is anaphylaxis?

According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI), anaphylaxis is a life threatening allergic reaction. It is a condition which affects several different parts of the body which may include the skin:

flushing, itching, or hives, the airway: swelling of the throat, difficulty talking or breathing, the intestines: nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea; and the ability of the heart to pump blood: low blood pressure or unconsciousness.



Symptoms usually appear rapidly, sometimes within minutes of exposure to the allergen, and can be life threatening. Immediate medical attention is necessary when anaphylaxis occurs. Standard emergency treatment often includes an injection of epinephrine (adrenaline) to open up the airway and help reverse the reaction.

Do I have a food allergy?

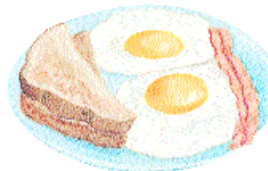
Of all the individuals who have any type of food sensitivity, most have food intolerances. Fewer people have true food allergy involving the immune system. According to recent studies, approximately 12 million Americans have a true food allergy.

What are other reactions or sensitivities to foods called?

Other reactions to foods that don't involve the immune system are commonly called food intolerance. Such reactions can be divided into “toxic” or “non-toxic” non-immunologic reactions to foods. Toxic reactions to foods include bacterial food poisoning, which can cause diarrhea. A non-toxic reaction is caused by a variety of naturally occurring components in food, resulting in a chemical or “drug-like” reaction when consumed at high enough doses. An example would be the “burning” sensation experienced when eating foods like chili peppers.

Non-toxic types of food intolerance can include adverse reactions to a food substance that involves digestion or metabolism (breakdown of food by the body). Lactose intolerance is an example of the most common type of food intolerance. It occurs when a person lacks an enzyme needed to digest milk sugar. If a person who is lactose-intolerant eats too much of a milk product, they may experience symptoms such as gas, bloating and abdominal pain.

Other suspected adverse reactions attributed to foods such as sugar and food colors, for example, have not been proven.



Am I allergic to food additives?

Probably not. Misconceptions abound regarding allergy to food additives and preservatives. Although some food additives, like sulfites, have been shown to trigger asthma or hives in certain people, most studies performed on additives with modern methods have been negative. Sulfite sensitivity or sulfite-induced asthma is an exception though. It affects about 6% of people with asthma. When they eat food or beverages with a high enough concentration of sulfite, it can cause a severe asthma attack that could be life-threatening.

Aspartame, monosodium glutamate and several food dyes have been studied extensively. Scientific evidence shows that they do not cause allergic reactions.