

Food Allergies and Reactions



What are food allergies?

When some people eat certain foods, even a tiny bit, they can have an allergic reaction, such as a rash, runny nose or itchy eyes. Some could even have a more serious reaction that can cause death. That type of reaction is called *anaphylaxis* (*an-a-fi-LAK-sis*).

A food that causes an allergic reaction is called a food allergen. It's usually the protein part of the food (also called a food protein) that cause the allergic reaction.

Which foods cause allergic reactions?

In children, six foods cause almost all food allergy reactions:

- Milk
- Egg
- Peanuts
- Wheat
- Soy
- Tree nuts (like walnuts and pecans)

Both raw and cooked foods can cause allergic reactions. (Cooking a food does not prevent it from causing an allergic reaction.)

Children will often outgrow an allergy to eggs, milk and soy.

In adults, four foods cause almost all food allergy reactions:

- Peanuts
- Tree nuts
- Fish
- Shellfish

Who gets food allergies? Can they be stopped?

Once you have food allergies, there are not any medicines that make food allergies go away. If you are allergic to a certain food, the only way to make sure you won't have a reaction is to never taste, touch or even smell the food.

Moms who breast feed their babies might keep the babies from getting food allergies. Another way to keep babies from getting food allergies is to wait to feed them foods that often cause food allergies:

- Try to wait until babies are 6 months old before you give them solid foods. Wait until they are 1 year old before giving them milk and other dairy (like cheese and yogurt).
- Toddlers should not eat eggs until they are 2 years old.
- Children should not eat peanuts, nuts or fish until they are 3 years old.

Talk to your doctor about a plan for introducing these foods.

How can I tell if I have food allergies?

If you think you are allergic to a food, an allergist/immunologist will do tests to find out which foods you are allergic to.



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What are the signs of a food allergy?

Your body could respond in several ways if you are allergic to a certain food:

- Your skin could become red, itchy or develop a rash.
- Your nose could become stuffy or itchy, you might start sneezing, or your eyes could itch and develop tears.
- You might vomit, have stomach cramps or diarrhea.

How dangerous are food allergies?

Food allergies can lead to death. A life-threatening reaction caused by allergy is called *anaphylaxis* (*an-a-fi-LAK-sis*). You need to immediately call 9-1-1 if the following happens after you eat something:

- Hoarseness, throat tightness, or a lump in your throat.
- Wheezing, chest tightness or having a hard time breathing.
- Tingling in the hands or feet, lips or scalp.

If you have any of these reactions, call 9-1-1. An anaphylactic reaction moves very quickly and can cause death.

What should I do if I have one or more food allergies?

Avoid the food (or food proteins) you're allergic to. If, for example, you're allergic to milk, avoid milk, yogurt, ice cream and anything that is made with milk. This sounds simple, but food proteins can hide in places you might not expect to find them, most often as ingredients in other foods.

Food labels usually list all the ingredients in any given food. That's why it's a good idea, if you have food allergies, to read the labels. If you see one of your food allergens is listed, don't eat the food. The problem, though, is that a food protein can have more than one name. Different names for some food ingredients appear below:

Milk proteins:

- Casein, caseinates, rennet casein
- Lactalbumin, lactalbumin phosphate, lactoglobulin, lactulose

Egg proteins:

- Albumin (also spelled albumen)
- Meringue or meringue powder
- These items also may include egg protein: artificial flavors; lecithin; macaroni; marzipan; marshmallows; nougat, and pasta. Read the label of these products very carefully.

If you are allergic to peanuts, avoid the following ingredients:

- Artificial nuts, beer nuts, ground nuts, mixed nuts, monkey nuts, nut pieces
- Cold pressed, expelled or extruded peanut oil or arachis oil
- Mandelonas
- Peanut butter, peanut flour
- These items may include peanut protein: African, Chinese, Indonesian, Mexican, Thai and Vietnamese dishes; baked goods; candy; chili; egg rolls; enchilada sauce; flavoring; marzipan; nougat, and sunflower seeds.

If you have food allergies, don't be shy about asking restaurants, friends, or anyone else serving you food to list the food's ingredients. Tell them you have food allergies and it's important that you know so that you don't become sick.

Food allergy is a serious condition, but by working with your doctor and avoiding foods, you can stay healthy. Your doctor can answer other questions you might have about food allergies. Visit www.aaaai.org for more educational materials on food allergies.



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