Food Allergies

What are food allergies?
Food allergies happen when your body’s immune system mistakes a food as something bad and attacks it. This causes symptoms of an allergic reaction, which can be life-threatening.

It can be easy to mistake a food intolerance for a food allergy. Food intolerance does not involve the immune system and is not life-threatening. Lactose intolerance (trouble digesting milk sugar) is a common example of a food intolerance.

What are the signs of a food allergy?
Symptoms of a food allergy can appear within minutes after you eat the food. Symptoms can also be delayed for up to 2 hours after you eat.

Mild signs of a food allergy may include:
- Red, itchy skin; hives
- Upset stomach
- Tingling or itching of the mouth and lips
- Stuffy, itchy nose, sneezing (rare)
- Red, itchy, watery eyes (rare)

The above symptoms should be treated with an antihistamine, such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl®) or cetirizine (Zyrtec®), as soon as you can.

Anaphylaxis (an-afl-LAK-sis) is a more serious and severe allergic reaction that starts quickly and can cause death.

More serious signs of a food allergy may include:
- Vomiting, stomach pain, diarrhea (loose stools)
- Hoarse voice, tight throat or feeling like there is a lump in your throat
- Wheezing, chest tightness or trouble breathing
- Hives or drooling in younger children
- The feeling that something bad is happening
- Fainting

These above symptoms are treated with a shot of epinephrine or an EpiPen®. If an EpiPen® is used, the person must be taken to the nearest emergency room or call 911.

Can you prevent food allergies?
In high risk infants, early introduction of peanuts may prevent peanut allergy. Call your allergist with questions about this approach. Infants are tested before these foods are introduced.

Not eating food you are allergic to while pregnant or breastfeeding will not prevent your child from having food allergies.

Waiting longer than 4 to 6 months of age to start solid foods will not prevent food allergies. Infants may be given all foods right for their age. This includes foods that contain milk, eggs, peanut, tree nuts, soy or wheat.

Using soy milk formula instead of cow’s milk for infants will not prevent food allergies.
If food allergies are present, there are no medicines or treatments that will make them go away. **The only way to prevent a reaction is to avoid the food you are allergic to.**

**How are food allergies diagnosed?**
A doctor (such as an Allergist) will review the history of the allergic reaction and may do allergy testing.

You may be asked questions such as:
- Which foods were eaten?
- What were the symptoms after eating the food?
- How soon after eating the food did the symptoms start?
- How long did the symptoms last?
- How were the symptoms treated?
- Has this happened before?
- What happened other times this food was eaten?

Tests may involve a skin prick or blood test. The skin prick test can be done in the clinic. Results are ready within 15 minutes. The blood test measures the level of the allergic protein or IgE. Blood test results take longer (about 1 week).

The doctor may decide that food allergies are present if there is a history of having a reaction when eating a certain food and there are positive allergy test results.

**What are other food allergy facts?**
It is thought that between 6-8% of children and adults have food allergies.

The only way to prevent a reaction to a food allergen is to strictly avoid it. Always read the list of ingredients for each food.

Food labels list the ingredients and laws mandate all common allergens are clearly listed on the label (such as “milk”, “egg” or “peanut”).

Warning labels such as "may contain" or "processed in a facility that also processes..." are not required. Random tests of products with these labels have found results that range from “none” to “higher amounts” that could cause an allergic reaction. **We suggest that you avoid these foods.**

**What should we know about food labels?**
There are laws in place about food labels to help keep you or your loved one safe. Food labels must clearly list the food source or any ingredients that are among the top 8 major food allergens.

The top 8 include:
- Milk
- Soy
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts
- Egg
- Soy
- Wheat
- Fish
- Shellfish

**What is cross-contamination?**
Cross-contamination happens when other food(s) may come in contact with a food allergen or any food you need to avoid. This can be a serious problem for people with food allergies.
Companies often put statements on labels that say, “may contain traces of” or “produced in a facility that contains” or “manufactured on shared equipment.” These statements are not required by law. Studies show that foods with these labels can be cross-contaminated and most people with food allergies should avoid them.

**How do I dine out with food allergies?**

It can be stressful to dine out when you have food allergies. It is best to call ahead or go to restaurants that cater to food allergies. Some larger and chain restaurants train their staff on safe food handling. They may also offer more options of foods that are safe from your allergens. There are phone apps that can suggest restaurants in your area that might be good options.
Websites
- **Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE)** - [www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org)
  Provides many resources, including information for schools, daycares, webinars for parents, research, and traveling.
- **Kids with Food Allergies** - [www.kidswithfoodallergies.org](http://www.kidswithfoodallergies.org)
  This is great for newly diagnosed families, wonderful recipe collection, webinars and other information.
- **American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI)** - [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)

Medical Alert Resources
- **Allermates** [www.allermates.com](http://www.allermates.com)
- **Lauren’s Hope** [www.laurenshope.com](http://www.laurenshope.com)
- **Medicalert** [www.medicalert.org](http://www.medicalert.org)
- **Medical ID Store** [www.medicalidstore.com](http://www.medicalidstore.com)
- **Amazon** also has many options [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Resources for Peanuts and Tree Nuts without Cross Contamination
Always read labels as processing or ingredients can change.
- **Almonds** - Barney Butter, Wonderful Brand Almonds (pistachios are made in a separate facility)
- **Cashews** - Sunshine Nut Company
- **Pistachios** - Wonderful Brand (almonds are made in a separate facility)
- **Walnuts** - Daniel’s Farm and Derby Walnuts
- **Tree Nuts** - Futters Nut Butters (no peanuts, gluten or dairy on site, but multiple tree nuts)
- **Hazelnut** - Nutella (contains milk)
- **Pecans** - Daniels Farm
- **Peanut Butter** - Skippy, Jif, Santa Cruz Organic, Smucker’s, Trader Joe’s

Website for More Resources
[www.nutfreenewyork.com](http://www.nutfreenewyork.com) (look for their food list)

Recipe/Shopping Phone Apps
- **SpoonGuru**
- **Yum**
- **ContentChecked**
- **MyFoodFacts**
- **AllergyEats**

Local Contacts (Madison)
- **Food Allergy Association of Wisconsin (FAAW)** - [www.foodallergywis.org](http://www.foodallergywis.org)