

Food Allergies

Every three minutes, a food allergy reaction sends someone to the emergency room in the U.S.

Symptoms typically appear within minutes to several hours after eating the food to which you are allergic. An allergic reaction to food can affect the skin, the gastrointestinal tract, the respiratory tract and, in the most serious cases, the cardiovascular system.

Reactions can range from mild to severe, including the potentially life-threatening condition anaphylaxis.

Remember that reactions can be unpredictable. The first signs of a reaction can be mild, but symptoms can worsen quickly. And what caused a mild reaction one time can lead to a severe reaction the next time.

Keep in mind that children may communicate their symptoms differently than adults.

Mild to moderate symptoms may include one or more of the following

- Hives (reddish, swollen, itchy areas on the skin)
- Eczema flare (a persistent dry, itchy rash)
- Redness of the skin, particularly around the mouth or eyes
- Itchy mouth or ear canal
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach pain
- Nasal congestion or a runny nose
- Sneezing
- Slight, dry cough
- Odd taste in mouth

Severe symptoms may include one or more of the following

Swelling of the lips, tongue, and/or throat that blocks breathing

- Trouble swallowing
- Shortness of breath or wheezing
- Turning blue
- Drop in blood pressure (feeling faint, confused, weak, passing out)
- Loss of consciousness
- Chest pain
- A weak or “thready” pulse
- Sense of “impending doom”

Severe symptoms, alone or combined with milder symptoms, may be signs of life-threatening anaphylaxis. This requires immediate treatment.

Epinephrine is the first-line treatment for anaphylaxis, and your anaphylaxis plan should be individualized by your healthcare provider. Delays in administering epinephrine for severe or persistent symptoms can be very dangerous, especially when the delay is an hour or longer.

What is a Food Allergy?

Food allergy is a serious and potentially life-threatening medical condition affecting up to 15 million Americans. One in every 13 children has a food allergy—that's about 2 in every U.S. classroom. And every 3 minutes, a food allergy reaction sends someone to the emergency room.

Food allergy is among the diseases considered to be part of the Atopic March. Also known as the Allergic March, this term refers to the progression of allergic diseases in a person's life: eczema, food allergy, allergic rhinitis and asthma. Not everyone will follow this progression, or experience every condition.

What Causes a Food Allergy?

The job of the body's immune system is to identify and destroy germs (such as bacteria or viruses) that make you sick. A food allergy happens when your immune system overreacts to a harmless food protein—an allergen.

In the U.S., the eight most common food allergens are milk, egg, peanut, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish.

Family history appears to play a role in whether someone develops a food allergy. If you have other kinds of allergic reactions, like eczema or hay fever, you have a greater risk of food allergy. This is also true of asthma.

Food allergies are not the same as food intolerances, and food allergy symptoms overlap with symptoms of other medical conditions. It is therefore important to have your food allergy confirmed by an appropriate evaluation with an allergist.

Food Allergies Are Serious

Food allergy may occur in response to any food, and some people are allergic to more than one food. Food allergies may start in childhood or as an adult.

All food allergies have one thing in common: They are potentially serious. Always take food allergies—and the people who live with them—seriously.

Food allergy reactions can vary unpredictably from mild to severe. Mild food allergy reactions may involve only a few hives or minor abdominal pain, though some food allergy reactions progress to severe anaphylaxis with low blood pressure and loss of consciousness.

Food Have No Cure Allergies

Currently, there is no cure for food allergies. The only way to prevent reactions is to completely avoid the food you are allergic to.

But research is making a difference. Every day, scientists are working toward a better understanding of food allergies—so we can find life-saving treatments.

Common Food Allergens

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| Milk Allergy | Allergy to cow's milk is the most common food allergy in infants and young children. |
| Egg Allergy | Egg allergy is one of the most common food allergies in children, second only to milk allergy. |
| Peanut Allergy | Peanut allergy is one of the most common food allergies. |
| Tree Nut Allergy | Tree nuts include walnut, almond, hazelnut, cashew, pistachio and Brazil nuts. |
| Wheat Allergy | Wheat allergy is most common in children—though most usually outgrow it by age three. |
| Fish Allergy | Salmon, tuna and halibut are just three kinds of finned fish people can be allergic to. |
| Shellfish Allergy | Shellfish (including crab, lobster, shrimp and mussels) is one of the more common food allergies. |
| Sesame Allergy | Allergy to sesame affects hundreds of thousands of Americans—though you won't always find it called out on food labels. |
| Other Food Allergens | A person can be allergic to practically any food including corn, gelatin, meats, seeds, fruits and vegetables |

More Information and Resources

Emergency Care Plan - <https://www.foodallergy.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/emergency-care-plan.pdf>

Guide to living with Allergies - <https://www.foodallergy.org/sites/default/files/2018-01/field-guide.pdf>