

FOOD ALLERGY FACT SHEET

Overview of Food Allergies

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is when the body mistakenly reacts to a certain food or ingredient as if it were harmful. The food that causes the reaction is called an allergen.

What are the symptoms of a food allergy reaction?

Symptoms can happen within a few minutes or up to a few hours of the allergen being eaten and can be seen or felt in different parts of the body.

- Skin rash or eczema
- Swelling of the tongue or throat and difficulty breathing
- Itching in the mouth and throat, cramps, nausea, diarrhea, and/or vomiting
- Drop in blood pressure and loss of consciousness
- Death

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a serious reaction that happens quickly. Anaphylaxis can involve many different parts of the body. The most severe symptoms can restrict breathing and blood circulation and may cause death.

What are the most common foods that cause allergic reactions?

The most common foods include:

- milk
- eggs
- peanuts
- tree nuts (for example walnuts, almonds, cashews, pistachios, and pecans)
- wheat
- soy
- fish
- crustacean shellfish (for example shrimp, lobster, and crab)



How are food allergies diagnosed?

A doctor can diagnose food allergies by using a variety of tests.

How are allergic reactions treated?

Reactions should be treated according to the student's Food Allergy Action Plan/Emergency Care Plan. Antihistamines and other medicines can be used. In severe cases, the medicine epinephrine should be given as soon as possible. Always call 911!

How can an allergic reaction be avoided?

The best way to avoid a reaction is to avoid the food that causes the allergy. Develop a system for checking ingredient labels carefully and have a plan to limit the ways in which the child could have contact with allergens, including airborne.

What is cross-contact?

Cross-contact happens when a food containing an allergen comes in contact with a food or surface that does not contain an allergen. Cross-contact is also called cross-contamination.



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For More Information

Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network
<http://www.foodallergy.org>

Food Allergy Initiative
<http://www.faiusa.org>

International Food Information Council
School foodservice and food allergies: What we need to know.
www.foodinsight.org/

U.S. Department of Agriculture
www.usda.gov

U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Food Allergens
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/FoodAllergens/default.htm>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Food allergies: What you need to know <http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm079311.htm>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health
Food allergy: An overview <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/foodAllergy/Documents/foodAllergy.pdf>

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