

## What You Should Know About Food Allergy

More than 2 million children with food allergies head back to school each year. Parents and school staff must work together to provide safe situations for students with allergies and asthma. School staff and others should work with parents to:



### Allergy & Asthma Resources for Professionals

- Complete a "Food Allergy Action Plan" (available at [www.foodallergy.org/actionplan.pdf](http://www.foodallergy.org/actionplan.pdf)).
- Inform the school cafeteria workers, teachers and other staff of child's allergies.
- Provide a list of foods to avoid and offer safe alternatives.
- Provide a picture of child for the cafeteria cooks and cashier.
- Pack bag lunches if cafeteria options are limited.
- Work with the school to establish a peanut-free lunch table, if necessary.
- Offer safe snacks to child during class parties and other activities involving food.
- Advocate "no eating" policies on buses and other settings where students aren't supervised.
- Keep medication, such as antihistamine or auto-injectable epinephrine, in the child's classroom or backpack. Check with school administrators on their medication policies.

With a true food allergy, an individual's immune system will overreact to an ordinarily harmless food.

## Foods That Most Often Cause Allergic Reactions

Eight foods account for up to 90% of all food-allergic reactions. They are:

- Peanuts
- Tree nuts (such as pecans, almonds, walnuts, pistachio, nuts, cashews, hazelnuts and Brazil nuts)
- Fish
- Shellfish
- Milk

- Eggs
- Soy (rarely causes anaphylaxis)
- Wheat (rarely causes anaphylaxis)

Dangers from food are not limited to the cafeteria. Food is frequently used as a reward, incorporated into art projects and provided at after-school activities. Be sure every adult who interacts with a child is aware of his allergies.

## More severe, life-threatening symptoms of an allergic reaction

### *Respiratory*

- Shortness of breath
- Tightness of chest
- Difficulty swallowing
- Itching or swelling of tongue, throat

### *Cardiovascular (circulatory)*

- Change in voice
- Shock
- Drop in blood pressure
- Fainting

Reactions can range from mild to life threatening (see Anaphylaxis section).

The same food can cause a different reaction from person to person.

There is no way to know how serious a reaction will become, so it is important to treat all reactions quickly.

## Treatment of Food Allergy

*Avoid the food.* The best way to treat food allergy is to avoid the specific foods that trigger the allergy.

*Ask about ingredients.* To avoid eating a "hidden" food allergen away from home, food-allergic individuals must always inquire about ingredients when eating at school and make the seriousness of their allergy known.

*Read food labels.* It is important for food-allergic people and school personnel to carefully read food labels. The United States and many other countries have adopted food labeling rules that ensure food allergens are listed in common language, such as "milk" rather than a scientific or technical term, like "casein."

*Be prepared for emergencies.* Anaphylactic reactions caused by food allergies can be potentially life-threatening. Those who have experienced an anaphylactic reaction to a food must strictly avoid that food.

They may need to carry and know how to use injectable epinephrine and antihistamines to treat reactions due to accidental ingestion.

People who are commonly around the patient, such as school nurses and teachers, should also know how to use the injectable epinephrine.

Those with food allergies should also wear an identification bracelet that describes the allergy. If a student has an anaphylactic reaction after eating a food, it is essential that the student have someone take him/her to the emergency room, even if symptoms subside. For proper diagnosis and treatment, make sure to get follow-up care from an allergist/immunologist. To find an allergist/immunologist near you, visit the AAAAI Physician Referral Directory at [www.aaaai.org/physref/](http://www.aaaai.org/physref/).

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