

Am I allergic to food additives?

Probably not. Misconceptions abound regarding allergy to food additives and preservatives. Although some food components have been shown to trigger asthma or hives in certain people, these reactions are not the same as those observed with food.

Many of these additives, including aspartame, monosodium glutamate and several food dyes have been studied extensively. Scientific evidence shows that they do not cause allergic reactions.



What important information should I and my friends and family know?

Because food allergy can be life threatening, the allergy-producing food must be completely avoided. If you, or someone else, are experiencing a severe food allergic reaction, **call 911** (or an ambulance) immediately and execute your response plan.

Most life-threatening allergic reactions to foods occur when eating away from the home. It is important to explain your situation and needs clearly to your host or food server. If necessary, ask to speak with the chef or manager.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires that ingredients are listed on most food labels. Be sure to look at the listings on labels to determine the presence of the eight major allergens. Since food and beverage manufacturers are continually making improvements, food-allergic persons should read the food label for every product purchased, each time it is purchased.



Many different foods can cause food allergic reactions. However, most reactions to foods are not food allergies but some other type of food sensitivity.

Food sensitivities may be a

- food allergy,
- food intolerance, or
- food idiosyncrasy.

The eight most common food allergens are milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish.

If you, or someone else, are having a serious allergic reaction to a food...
CALL 911! (or call an ambulance).



ALSO AVAILABLE FROM THE IFIC FOUNDATION:

IFIC Review: Understanding Food Allergy
Food Additives
Food Color Facts

ENDORSED BY:



611 East Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202
1-800-822-2762
<http://www.aaaai.org>



The Food Allergy Network
10400 Eaton Place, Suite 107
Fairfax, VA 22030-2208
1-800-929-4040
<http://www.foodallergy.org>

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:



International Food Information Council Foundation
1100 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 430
Washington, DC 20036 • <http://ificinfo.health.org>

Understanding Food Allergy



Allergies affect the lives of millions of people around the world.

Fresh spring flowers, a friend's cat or dog, even the presence of dust can make people itch, sneeze and scratch almost uncontrollably. But what about that seemingly innocent peanut butter sandwich, glass of milk or fish fillet?

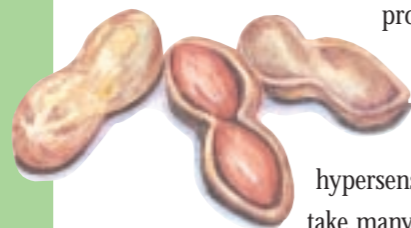
Almost two percent of Americans have an allergy to these or other foods. Food allergies can be life threatening.

Knowledge about food allergies can help save a life.



What is a food allergy?

Food allergy is a reaction of the body's immune system to something in a food or an ingredient in a food—usually a protein. It can be a serious condition and should be diagnosed by a board-certified allergist. A true food allergy (also called “food hypersensitivity”) and its symptoms can take many forms.



Which foods cause food allergy?

The eight most common food allergens—milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish—cause more than 90 percent of all food allergic reactions. However, many other foods have been identified as allergens for some people.

What are the symptoms of food allergy?

Symptoms of food allergy differ greatly among individuals. They can also differ in the same person during different exposures.

Allergic reactions to food can vary in severity, time of onset, and may be affected by when the food was eaten.

Common symptoms of food allergy include skin irritations such as rashes, hives and eczema, and gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, diarrhea and vomiting. Sneezing, runny nose and shortness of breath can also result from food allergy.

Some individuals may experience a more severe reaction called anaphylaxis.

What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a rare but potentially fatal condition in which several different parts of the body experience allergic reactions.



These may include itching, hives, swelling of the throat, difficulty breathing, lower blood pressure and unconsciousness.

Symptoms usually appear rapidly, sometimes within minutes of exposure to the allergen, and can be life threatening. Immediate medical attention is necessary when anaphylaxis occurs. Standard emergency treatment often includes an injection of epinephrine (adrenaline) to open up the airway and blood vessels.

Do I have a food allergy?

Of all the individuals who have any type of food sensitivity, most have food intolerances. Fewer people have true food allergy involving the immune system.

According to the National Institutes of Health, approximately 5 million Americans, (5 to 8% of children and 1 to 2% of adults) have a true food allergy.

What are other reactions or sensitivities to foods called?

Other reactions to foods are called food intolerance and food idiosyncrasy. Food intolerance and food idiosyncrasy reactions are generally localized, temporary, and rarely life threatening, whereas food allergy can cause life-threatening reactions.

Food intolerance is an adverse reaction to a food substance or additive that involves digestion or metabolism (breakdown of food by the body) but does not involve the immune system. Lactose intolerance is an example of food intolerance. It occurs when a person lacks an enzyme needed to digest milk sugar. If a person who is lactose intolerant eats milk products, they may experience symptoms such as gas, bloating and abdominal pain.

Food idiosyncrasy is an abnormal



response to a food or food substance. The reaction can resemble or differ from symptoms of true food allergy. Idiosyncratic reactions to food do not involve the immune system. Sulfite sensitivity or sulfite-induced asthma is an example of a food idiosyncrasy that affects small numbers of people in the population. However, sulfite-induced asthma can be potentially life threatening.

Other suspected adverse reactions to foods such as to corn, high fructose corn syrup and sugar have rarely been demonstrated as true food allergies. Some foods contain a variety of either naturally occurring or added components that can cause a chemical, or drug-like reaction. The “burning” sensation when eating foods like chili peppers is an example of a chemical food reaction.

What should I do if I believe I have an adverse reaction to a certain food?

You should see a board-certified allergist to get a diagnosis. An allergist and dietitian can best help the food-allergic patient manage diet issues with little sacrifice to nutrition or the pleasure of eating.

Making a diagnosis may include:

- A thorough medical history;
- The analysis of a food diary; and
- Several tests including skin-prick tests, RAST tests (blood test) and food challenges (using different foods to test for allergic reactions).

Once a diagnosis is complete, an allergist will help set up a response plan to manage allergic reactions that may occur. A response plan may include taking medication by injection to control allergic reactions.

