



FOOD ALLERGIES

What is a food allergy?

- The body's immune system normally defends against dangerous foreign objects, such as bacteria and viruses.
- An allergy is when the immune system accidentally learns to target something which is not dangerous, such as a food.
- The immune system will target the food as soon as the body is exposed to it (e.g. through eating or touching the food). This is what causes symptoms and signs of the food allergy – it is an over-reaction by your immune system.
- True allergy symptoms start within minutes after exposure to the food
- The allergy can cause cough, wheeze, vomiting, belly pain, swelling of the face and lips, and/or hives.
- Common foods which may cause allergies include: peanuts, tree nuts, eggs, shellfish, fish, milk, soy, and sesame.

What to do if you think your child has a food allergy:

- If they have breathing difficulty, vomiting, or other symptoms of allergy after eating a food, call 911 for help. Use an epinephrine injector (e.g. EpiPen) if you have one.
- If you are unsure whether a food caused an allergic reaction, do not give your child that food (or foods with that ingredient) until you speak with a doctor about it.
- If your doctor suspects a food allergy, they may prescribe an epinephrine injector and/or refer your child to an allergy specialist.

What is *not* a food allergy?

- Some foods, especially acidic foods such as tomatoes or berries, can cause a rash around the mouth and other areas they touch, with no other symptoms. This is skin irritation (*irritant/contact dermatitis*) from the food, not an allergy.
- Some school-aged children and teenagers get digestive symptoms after consuming dairy (e.g. nausea, bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhea, flatulence). This may be due to *lactose intolerance*, which is not an allergy. Speak to your doctor about treatment options.
- Food “intolerances” may cause milder symptoms and are not due to an immune system over-reaction in the way allergies are.
- *Celiac disease* is a rare, serious condition, but is not a true allergy. Speak to your doctor if your child has digestive issues (e.g. nausea, belly pain, diarrhea) when they eat foods containing gluten.

Other food allergy facts:

- Some allergies may disappear over time. For example, most children will outgrow a wheat or egg allergy by adulthood.
- Food allergies are linked to asthma and atopic dermatitis (“eczema”). If you have one, you’re more likely to have the others.
- The earlier a child is exposed to certain foods, the less likely they are to develop an allergy to it. For example, children who eat peanut-containing foods at 6 months of age (e.g. peanut butter in their cereal), are much less likely to become allergic to peanuts than children exposed after 2 years of age.
- Breastfeeding decreases the risk of developing a food allergy.
- Some non-physician practitioners (e.g. naturopaths) may suggest “allergy tests” (i.e. “Food-specific IgG testing”) for your child. Please note that these tests *have never been proven* to diagnose allergies. You should not change your child’s diet based on these tests, and should speak to your physician if you have any concerns. (more info: <https://www.aaaai.org/conditions-and-treatments/library/allergy-library/IgG-food-test>)
- Children with food allergies should wear a medical alert bracelet or necklace to identify the allergy to first responders (<https://www.medicalert.ca/>)

For more information, please see:

<https://www.foodallergy.org/>

<https://foodallergycanada.ca>