

# 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 after being eaten, inhaled, or coming in contact with the allergen. Symptoms can be seen or felt in different parts of the body.

- Hives (reddish, swollen, itchy areas on the skin)
- Skin rash of eczema
- Swelling of the tongue or throat and difficulty breathing
- Itching in the mouth, throat, or ear canal
- Abdominal cramps, nausea, diarrhea, and/or vomiting
- Nasal congestion or a runny nose
- Sneezing or slight, dry cough
- Odd taste in the mouth
- Trouble swallowing
- Shortness of breath, 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”
- Anaphylaxis
- 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 qualified medical professional, such as an allergist or physician, 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, epinephrine should be given as soon as possible. Always call 911!

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## 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 the allergens, including airborne.

## What is cross-contact?

Cross-contact happens when food containing an allergen comes in contact with food or surface that does not contain an allergen. For example, using a knife to spread peanut butter and using that same knife for cutting a turkey sandwich without properly cleaning in between could transfer peanut allergens.

## References

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## For More Information

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
*Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Programs*  
<http://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/>
- Institute of Child Nutrition  
<http://www.theicn.org/foodsafety>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture  
<http://www.usda.gov>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration  
*Food Allergens*  
<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-ingredients-packaging/food-allergens>

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