

FOOD ALLERGY FACT SHEET

Peanut Allergies

Why should special precautions be taken with peanut allergies?

Peanuts are one of the most dangerous allergies because peanuts tend to cause particularly severe reactions. Peanut allergies account for the largest number of allergy-related deaths and the greatest incidence of anaphylaxis (a serious allergic reaction that can cause death). For some individuals, trace amounts of peanuts can cause a severe reaction. Non-ingestion contact (such as touching peanuts or inhaling peanut particles) is less likely to trigger severe reactions compared with ingestion contact. Even so, extreme caution should always be used because proximity to peanuts increases the opportunity for ingestion. The prevalence of peanut allergies in American children tripled from 1997 to 2008. Still, approximately 20% of children with a peanut allergy do outgrow it.

What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of an allergic reaction to peanuts include:

- Eczema
- Hives, redness, or swelling of the skin
- Itching or tingling around or in mouth and throat
- Tightness in throat
- Asthma, shortness of breath, or wheezing
- Runny nose
- Digestive symptoms (diarrhea, stomach cramps, nausea, or vomiting)

Peanut is the most common cause of food-induced anaphylaxis. Signs of anaphylaxis may include one or more of the following symptoms:

- Constriction of airways (swollen throat or a lump in the throat making breathing difficult)
- A severe drop in blood pressure
- Rapid pulse
- Shock (a severe drop in blood pressure felt as dizziness, lightheadedness, or loss of consciousness)



What foods contain peanuts?

There are many unexpected sources of peanuts, so reading food labels is important to eliminate exposure to peanuts. Peanuts are often ingredients in prepared products and ethnic cuisines, such as African, Chinese, Indonesian, Mexican, Thai, and Vietnamese foods. Artificial nuts can be peanuts that have been decaffeinated and recaffeinated with pecan, walnut, or almond. Mandelonas are peanuts soaked in almond flavoring.

Many items may not contain peanuts but may be produced in a facility where peanuts are processed or used as an ingredient. As a result, cross-contact with peanuts may occur. Many snack foods may be produced in a facility where many different types of snack foods or many different varieties of a product (for example, cereal bars) are produced. Some of the varieties of that product may include peanuts or peanut butter. A product that is labeled as being produced in a facility with peanuts should not be consumed by an individual with a peanut allergy.



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Products or Ingredients with Peanuts

- Arachis oil (another name for peanut oil)
- Artificial nuts
- Beer nuts
- Candy/Candy cereals (chocolate candy)
- Chili
- Cold-pressed, expressed, or expelled peanut oil*
- Egg rolls
- Enchilada sauce
- Frozen yogurt and ice cream
- Glazes and marinades
- Granola bars, cereal bars, and breakfast bars
- Ground nuts
- Hydrolyzed plant protein
- Hydrolyzed vegetable protein
- Ice creams
- Lupin (or lupine) – common flour substitute for gluten-free food, reaction due to possible cross-reaction
- Mandelonas (peanuts soaked in almond flavoring)
- Marzipan
- Mixed nuts
- Nougat
- Nut meat
- Nut pieces
- Peanuts, peanut butter, peanut flour, monkey nuts, and goobers
- Peanut protein hydrolysate
- Potato pancakes
- Sauces such as chili sauce, spaghetti sauce, hot sauce, pesto, gravy, mole sauce, and salad dressing
- Specialty pizzas
- Sweets such as pudding, cookies, and hot chocolate
- Vegetarian food products, especially those advertised as meat substitutes

* Highly refined peanut oil is not required to be labeled as an allergen.

Those with peanut allergies need to be mindful of food items that may be produced on equipment that

also produces peanuts. These food items could still cause a reaction for a child with a peanut allergy.

Some examples include:

- African, Asian, and Mexican restaurant food
- Alternative nut butters, such as soy nut butter or sunflower seed butter
- Sunflower seeds

Where are peanuts located on food labels?

Food labels that are regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) follow the regulations of the *Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act* (FALCPA). FALCPA requires that the major eight food allergens are listed on the label in one of three ways: (1) using the common name, (2) common name written in parenthesis after the ingredient, or (3) in a “contains” statement.

For example, granola bars that contain peanuts could be labeled in either of the ways shown below (bold is used for illustrative purposes only):

| Label 1 | Label 2 |
|---|--|
| <p>INGREDIENTS: Roasted peanuts, high maltose corn syrup, sugar, dark chocolate chunks (chocolate liquor, sugar, soy lecithin, natural flavor), whole grain oats, high fructose corn syrup, rice flour, palm kernel oil, fructose, canola oil, nonfat milk, salt, peanut butter (peanuts, salt), whey, baking soda, malt</p> <p>Contains: Peanuts, Milk, Almond, Wheat, and Soy</p> | <p>INGREDIENTS: Roasted peanuts, high maltose corn syrup, sugar, dark chocolate chunks (chocolate liquor, sugar, soy lecithin, natural flavor), whole grain oats, high fructose corn syrup, rice flour, palm kernel oil, fructose, canola oil, nonfat milk, salt, peanut butter (peanuts, salt), whey, baking soda, malt</p> |



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Labels should also be checked for warnings such as “may contain peanuts,” “produced on shared equipment with peanuts,” or “produced in a plant that uses peanuts in other products.” These foods should be avoided as the product may contain a small amount of peanut through cross-contact.

USDA-regulated foods, namely meat, poultry, and egg products are not required to follow FALCPA labeling regulations but may do so voluntarily. Only common or usual names of the ingredients are required to be identified on these labels.

All child nutrition staff should be trained to read product labels and recognize food allergens. Because food labels change from time to time, child nutrition staff should check labels for peanut and peanut ingredients for every product each time it is received. It is recommended that labels be maintained for a minimum of 24 hours for every product served to a child with food allergies in case of a reaction. If a food item is saved as leftovers, the label should be kept for 24 hours after the product is completely used up or discarded.



What substitutes can be used for peanuts in student meals?

When menu substitutions or accommodations for a student with life-threatening food allergies are outside of the meal pattern, a statement from a state licensed healthcare professional, such as a physician, is required. Refer to the manual *Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs: Guidance for School Food Service Professionals* on the USDA website (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/2017-edition-accommodating-children-disabilities-school-meal-programs>) for information on the required content of the medical statement.

If there is uncertainty about the statement, or if it does not provide enough information, contact the household or healthcare professional (as permitted by the family) for clarification. However, clarification of the medical statement should not delay the child nutrition department from providing a meal modification. Child nutrition staff should follow the portion of the medical statement that is clear and unambiguous to the greatest extent possible while obtaining the additional information or amended statement.

When planning menus for children with peanut allergies, consider current food choices offered to determine if a reimbursable meal can be selected from foods offered that do not contain peanuts. This approach will minimize the need to prepare special recipes or to make menu substitutions. Child nutrition staff should always carefully read labels, even for foods that generally do not contain peanuts. The following chart lists common menu items that may be used as safe alternatives to items that contain peanuts.

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| Common Menu Items That May Contain Peanuts | Possible Substitutes or Alternatives That Do Not Typically Contain Peanuts* |
|--|---|
| Granola bars, cereal bars, and breakfast bars | Bars without peanut proteins |
| Ready-to-eat cereals | Ready-to-eat cereals without peanut proteins |
| Peanut butter and products including peanut butter | Soy butter, bean spreads, sunflower butter |
| Trail mix or snack mix | Scratch-made trail mix without peanuts or soy nuts |
| Baked goods: breakfast breads or rolls, cookies | Scratch-made breads, rolls, and cookies without peanut proteins |

*Always check the ingredient label to verify ingredients and check for potential cross-contact.

Common Questions

For a field trip, what is a good shelf-stable alternative to a peanut butter sandwich?

One option may be to substitute the peanut butter with soy or sunflower seed butters (please see the question on nut and seed butters). A few other options include a cheese sandwich, hummus or bean dip and chips, or a pre-cooked meal carried in a cooler with temperature control.

Can alternative nut butters (for example, cashew nut butter) or seed butters (for example, sunflower seed butter) be substituted for peanut butter?

Many nut and seed butters are produced on equipment used to process peanut butter, therefore making it somewhat of a risky alternative unless the manufacturer specifies that the item is peanut-free. Many experts recommend peanut-allergic patients avoid tree nuts, as well. Check with the manufacturer and healthcare professional for the safety of these alternatives.

How should I address a request for a peanut-free environment?

A school district's allergy policy should be based on consensus from all appropriate stakeholders involved. Many factors must be considered to determine if it is feasible to provide a peanut-free environment. Reasonable accommodations need to be taken if there are students with a peanut allergy, including discouraging food sharing, encouraging handwashing, and providing peanut-free zone guidelines to prevent ingestion, which is the most dangerous type of exposure. This request should be referred to the school's administrator.

Universal exclusion of specific foods (for example, peanuts) for an entire school is not a USDA, Food and Nutrition Service policy, but could be appropriate depending on local circumstances. However, if a school chooses to enact a universal ban, the specific allergen must never be present in the school, as the family will assume the school is a safe place for their child based on the stated ban. The school should still make every effort to educate the school community about food allergies to ensure the food allergen is not brought to school.

As a best practice, experts recommend placing a greater emphasis on educating the school community and raising awareness about food allergies, rather than banning a specific food since such an option cannot guarantee a totally safe environment or a fail-safe way to prevent an allergen from inadvertently entering into a building.



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Can a person with a peanut allergy consume tree nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans, etc.)?

About 30% to 40% of people with peanut allergies are also allergic to tree nuts, so many allergists recommend that people with peanut allergies also avoid tree nuts. Additionally, the incidence of cross-contact between peanuts and tree nuts during the manufacturing process is high. If there are questions for a particular student, refer to that student's medical statement or request clarification from their state licensed healthcare professional.

Can a person with a peanut allergy use peanut oil?

Highly-processed peanut oil has been shown to be safe for the vast majority of individuals allergic to peanuts. Peanut oils that are cold-pressed, expelled, or extruded may contain peanut particles, and are, therefore, NOT safe for use. Check with the healthcare professional about whether or not peanut oil is safe for the individual with a peanut allergy.

References

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For More Information

Food Allergy Research & Education
<http://www.foodallergy.org>

Institute of Child Nutrition
<http://www.theicn.org/foodsafety>

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

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