



Understanding Food Allergies & Food Labels

A 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.

What are the symptoms of food allergies?

Symptoms can vary between people and times of exposure and may include: rashes / hives, nausea, vomiting, shortness of breath, itchy eyes, diarrhea, coughing, sneezing, and in severe cases, anaphylaxis may occur.

What is anaphylaxis (severe food allergy)?

It is the most serious allergic reaction and involves the entire body. Anaphylaxis may result in death.

The symptoms are swelling of the throat, lower blood pressure, difficulty breathing and unconsciousness. Symptoms may appear within minutes and should be treated promptly.

Allergens most likely to trigger anaphylaxis are tree nuts, eggs, peanuts, and shellfish. However, anaphylaxis may result with any allergen and must be considered with serious precaution.

What is food intolerance?

It is an adverse reaction to a food substance or additive that involves digestion but does not involve the immune system. Food intolerance is not fatal. A common food intolerance is lactose (milk) intolerance

TOP 9 COMMON ALLERGENS

Below are the top 9 allergens, which must be called out on the label if an item contains an ingredient that is or contains protein from a "major food allergen" per the FDA labeling law. Visit fda.gov for more information.

1. **Milk**
2. **Eggs**
3. **Wheat**
4. **Soy**
5. **Fish**
6. **Shellfish (Crustaceans)**
7. **Peanuts**
8. **Tree Nuts**
9. **Sesame**



Is there a cure for food allergies?

Currently a medication is not available to cure food allergies. The only way to prevent a reaction is to completely avoid eating food containing allergenic ingredients. Even a very small amount can trigger an adverse reaction. However, many children do outgrow their allergies to egg, milk, soy, or wheat through long-term diligence of removing the allergen completely from the diet.

Food Label Requirements

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires food manufacturers to list common food allergens on labels in simple terms adults and older children can understand. While not every possible food that can cause a food allergy is listed, the nine foods which account for the majority of food allergies are required to be listed.

Food labels take some of the guesswork out of label reading, helping you more easily identify foods that could cause an allergic reaction. In 2006, the FDA mandated the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA). The rule requires that food manufacturers identify, "in plain, common language", the presence of any of the nine major food allergens - milk, egg, peanut, tree nut, fish, shellfish, wheat, soy, and sesame. For example, if lactose is listed within the ingredient statement, the label must also state "contains milk" at the end of the ingredient statement or place "(Milk)" after the word lactose.



Additional examples include:

"CONTAINS WHEAT."

- This statement is used if a product directly contains wheat as an ingredient.

"MAY CONTAIN PEANUTS."

- This statement is used if a product is produced on the same manufacturing line or within the same facility as one producing peanut-containing products.
- If an allergen is present in the same facility there will be a chance that it may have contaminated a product that does not directly contain the allergen as a main ingredient.