

FOOD ALLERGY AWARENESS

Food allergies are serious medical conditions, affecting millions of people every year

WHAT ARE FOOD ALLERGIES?

Food allergies are one of the most common and continuously growing immunological chronic health conditions. They can affect people of all ages. Symptoms can include hoarseness, cough, wheezing, chest tightness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fainting, and anaphylaxis. Food allergy reactions might not look the exact same each time you encounter an allergen and may even be affected by factors such as alcohol consumption or exercise.



WHAT IS ANAPHYLAXIS?

Anaphylaxis is a medical emergency that includes hives, swelling, throat closure, rapidly lowering blood pressure, and shock. Food-allergic reactions are the leading cause of anaphylaxis, and they can be life-threatening. If you or someone you are with is experiencing anaphylaxis, administer epinephrine and go to the ER right away.



IS THERE ANYTHING IN PLACE TO MAKE IDENTIFYING ALLERGEN-FREE FOOD EASIER?



Yes! The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (2004) defined 8 major food allergens (milk, eggs, fish, crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soybeans) and implemented specific labeling requirements. These requirements include an ingredient list or separate "contains" statement on all FDA-regulated packaged foods.

On January 1, 2023, the Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research Act will roll out. This Act requires sesame to be added to the list of major food allergens.

IS THERE TREATMENT FOR FOOD ALLERGIES?

Individuals must practice life-long food allergen avoidance in order to prevent reactions. When having a severe reaction, treatment will oftentimes involve epinephrine (often know by brand-name "Epi-Pen").



ARE THERE MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS?

The burden of avoidance, fear of exposure, past traumatic reactions, and the experience of not being taken seriously can result in anxiety, frustration, and internalization.



DO CHILDREN OUTGROW FOOD ALLERGIES?

While young children may sometimes outgrow certain allergies, this is not guaranteed. Allergies to peanuts, tree nuts, and seafood are especially common to persist throughout the lifetime or even appear in adulthood.



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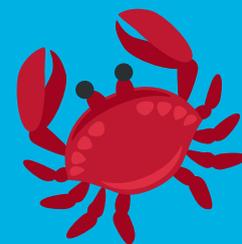
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HOW DO YOU READ FOOD LABELS?

Read packaged food labels every time you buy that food, even if you have purchased that item before. Food labels are required to list the 8 (soon to be 9) most common allergens and are often located on the back of a package. It is important to note that molluscan shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels, scallops, etc.) are not considered a major allergen.

You will either see the ingredient listed using the allergen's common name (ex: eggs), using the word "contains" followed by the name of the major food allergen, or in the ingredient list in parentheses ex: albumin (egg).

Language such as "May Contain" / "Processed in a facility that also processes" / "Made on equipment with" is voluntary for manufacturers. Additionally, phrases such as "peanut free" and "egg free" are not regulated.



TIPS FOR MANAGING FOOD ALLERGIES



If you don't see a label, skip that food item, especially if you or someone you're cooking for has allergies.

Look up uncommon names of your allergens just in case.

When in airplanes or traveling, keep your epinephrine close, such as on your body/under your seat.

Always let your host, restaurant, or server know about any allergies you have and how they should be accommodated.

When preparing or purchasing meals for guests, always ask about dietary restrictions and food allergies well in advance, so both you and your guest can prepare.

Clearly note when a food is allergen-free, especially during large gatherings

Have separate utensils for the allergen-free food items to avoid accidental cross-contamination.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FOOD ALLERGIES, VISIT THESE RESOURCES



Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE):
<https://www.foodallergy.org>

FASTER Act Overview (FDA):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bhw1rLUNRLM>

Nutrition Challenges as we Age:
<https://now.tufts.edu/2017/01/12/nutrition-challenges-we-age>

How to Read A Food Label:
<https://www.foodallergy.org/resources/how-read-food-label>

Food Allergy: Impact on Health-Related Quality of Life:
<https://www.uptodate.com/contents/food-allergy-impact-on-health-related-quality-of-life>

MD Department of Health, Food Allergy Awareness:
<https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/OEHFP/OFPCS/Pages/Food-Allergies.aspx>

Reducing Disparities in Allergy Immunology: The Time is Now: [https://www.jaci-inpractice.org/article/S2213-2198\(22\)00031-9/fulltext](https://www.jaci-inpractice.org/article/S2213-2198(22)00031-9/fulltext)

