

Allergens: Food

What is food allergy?

Food allergy is the body's reaction when the immune system mistakenly identifies a normally harmless food as damaging to the body.

What causes food allergy?

When IgE (immunoglobulin E) antibodies react with the food, histamines are released, which cause hives, asthma, or other symptoms of allergic reaction. IgE is a type of antibody formed to protect the body from infection.

What is the difference between food allergy and food intolerance?

Food allergy causes an immune system response, causing symptoms that range from uncomfortable to life-threatening. Food intolerance does not affect the immune system, although some symptoms may be the same as in food allergy.

What foods most often cause food allergy?

Approximately 90 percent of all food allergies are caused by eight foods:

- milk
- eggs
- wheat
- peanuts
- soy
- tree nuts
- fish
- shellfish

Eggs, milk, and peanuts are the most common causes of food allergies in children, with wheat, soy, and tree nuts also included. Peanuts, nuts, fish and shellfish commonly cause the most severe reactions. Nearly 5 percent of children have food allergies. Although most children "outgrow" their allergies, allergy to peanuts and tree nuts may be life-long.

What are symptoms of food allergy?

Allergic symptoms may begin within minutes to an hour after food is eaten. Symptoms can include:

- vomiting
- diarrhea
- cramps
- hives
- swelling
- eczema
- itching or swelling of the lips, tongue or mouth
- itching or tightness in the throat
- difficulty breathing
- wheezing
- lowered blood pressure
- hives
- eczema
- asthma

According to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, it doesn't take much of the food to cause a severe reaction in highly allergic people. In fact, as little as 1/44,000 of a peanut kernel can cause an allergic reaction for severely allergic individuals.

How may food allergy be treated?

Specific treatment for food allergy will be determined by your physician(s) based on:

- your overall health and medical history
- extent of the disease
- your tolerance for specific medications, procedures, or therapies
- expectations for the course of the disease
- your opinion or preference

At this time, no medication is available to prevent food allergy. The goal of treatment is to avoid the food that causes the symptoms.

People with food allergy must be prepared to treat any accidental ingestion of the foods that cause the allergic reaction. Talk with your physician about what to do in these cases.

There are medications available to treat some symptoms of food allergy after the food has been eaten. These medications may relieve rhinitis symptoms, gastrointestinal symptoms, or asthma symptoms. Talk with your physician about these medications.

Although research is ongoing, currently, there is no allergy injection treatment approved for the treatment of food allergies. Strictly avoiding the allergy-causing food is the only way to prevent a reaction.

Source:

[University of Maryland Medical Center Website](#)