



Food Allergy Facts

Food allergy affects approximately 1 percent to 2 percent of adults and twice as many children. Many parts of the body may be affected by food allergy, and the frequency and severity of symptoms can range from mild to life-threatening. Among the symptoms of food allergy are vomiting, nausea, stomach cramps, indigestion, diarrhea, hives, skin rash, headaches, asthma, earaches and respiratory symptoms such as nasal congestion, sneezing and runny nose. In rare cases, food allergies cause anaphylaxis - a severe, system-wide allergic reaction that is potentially fatal. As noted below, these symptoms can also be caused by things other than foods.

- Food allergy occurs most often in infants and children. However, it can appear at any age and can be caused by foods that have been eaten for years without problem.
- Almost any food can cause allergy, but the most common culprits are eggs, milk, nuts, soy, seafood, corn and wheat.
- An individual who is allergic to a certain food might also be allergic to related foods. For example, people allergic to peanuts often can't tolerate other members of the legume family of foods such as peas, beans and licorice.
- In some cases, food allergy may develop through excessive exposure to a certain food. Scandinavians, for example, have a high incidence of fish allergy.
- Reaction to a particular food can be affected by an individual's physical condition at the time. For example, susceptible individuals may be more likely to experience allergic reactions to food when they are suffering from colds, upset stomach, stress or other allergic diseases such as hay fever.
- Not all adverse reactions to food are due to allergy. Some reactions to milk, for example, are due to a deficiency of an enzyme that breaks down the lactose sugar in milk.
- In rare instances, food allergy can cause anaphylaxis. Individuals who experience severe symptoms such as swelling of the throat, tongue and nose; flushing (turning red); difficulty breathing; a sudden drop in blood pressure or loss of consciousness should seek emergency attention at once. After the episode is over, consultation with an allergist-immunologist to help identify triggers is indicated.
- Allergic reactions to food have been known to disappear for months or years. However, an individual who has a severe, immediate reaction to certain foods must NEVER taste them again. In some very sensitive persons, a small taste of an allergenic food can provoke a life-threatening reaction.