



FOOD ALLERGIES: JUST THE FACTS

Six to seven million Americans have food allergies; food-induced anaphylaxis causes 30,000 trips to the emergency room annually; 150-200 people die each year from severe food allergy reactions. Some food allergies are noticed in infancy: in 6% of children allergies show by age 2, but some may not develop any symptoms till adulthood. Food allergies, like other allergies, can emerge at any age. The best control against serious reactions to food is information on how to prevent and manage the food allergy reaction. This includes knowing how and when to administer epinephrine or adrenaline, usually in the form of an EpiPen. Any one with food allergy should have immediate access to an EpiPen.

Any food can cause an allergic reaction, yet 8 foods cause 90% of food reactions:

Milk	soy	eggs	wheat
Peanuts	tree nuts	fish	shellfish

A small number of people have food additive reactions rather than food allergies. These generally occur to these additives:

- * **Sulfites**, causing respiratory reactions and found in wine, dried fruits, white grape juice, frozen potatoes, fresh shrimp, certain jams & jellies
- * **Aspartame** or nutrasweet, causing hives and localized swelling
- * **Parabens** used to preserve food, medicines, sunscreens and shampoos can cause severe contact dermatitis
- * **Tartrazine** dye used in beverages, candy, ice cream, cheese, canned veggies, hot dogs, salad dressings, seasoned salts and catsup may cause hives or swelling
- * **MSG** used in oriental foods and in manufactured meats, poultry and other products to enhance flavors can cause headache, burning sensation at the back of the neck, chest tightness, nausea, diarrhea and sweating
- * **Nitrates and nitrites** used to preserve foods like hot dogs, bologna, salami and processed meats or fish, prevent botulism, enhance flavors and color foods may cause headaches, hives or skin reactions
- * **Benzoate** preservatives used in cakes, cereals, salad dressings, candy, margarine, oils and dry yeasts – but reactions are rare

Ways to Prevent Food Allergy Reactions:

- * Avoid consuming the allergic product, which means reading labels for listed allergens but also researching obscure terminology used in packaging products that may include the offending food
- * Take care when eating in restaurants: staff isn't always aware of specific menu ingredients or how food is prepared (you may not be allergic to potatoes, but those fries might be made in peanut oil)
- * When eating out, cross-contamination is always an issue. Ask food servers or the chef how the food is prepared (are the same utensils and knives used for fish as for other foods, cutting surfaces cleaned between preparations, etc). Ask which oils are used in that kitchen, especially peanut oils which can be deadly. Ask the chef in advance, if possible, which dishes they can recommend to avoid allergic foods.
- * Exercise caution with pre-packaged food packs (Lunchables, etc) as there is a risk of cross contamination when eating foods packaged in multi-packs
- * Learn the allergic symptoms and be prepared with an EpiPen, and know how to use one