

Food Allergies

By Emily Walker, MS, LDN, RD

While we obviously need food to live, millions of people around the world are actually allergic to some foods. For these people, certain foods trigger an immune system response to the food or ingredient that the body believes is harmful and that reaction can often be life threatening.

Fortunately, most reactions to foods are not food allergies but some form of food sensitivity, which could be a food intolerance. A diagnosis should be made by an allergist.

The eight most common food allergens are milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, wheat, soy, peanuts and tree nuts. Symptoms vary among individuals and usually appear within minutes to hours after the individual has consumed the allergen. Some symptoms include swelling of the tongue and throat, difficulty breathing, hives, rash, vomiting, cramping and diarrhea. Fortunately, many people will eventually outgrow food allergies.

In order to maintain a balanced diet, do not remove foods from your diet just because you *think* you are allergic to them. It is best to seek help from an allergist to obtain an official diagnosis. You may be asked to keep a strict food diary to record foods you eat, your reaction to them, and how long it takes for symptoms to occur.

Once a diagnosis has been made, it is important to avoid food allergens to prevent a reaction. A registered dietitian can help to manage your diet without giving up the enjoyment of eating or compromising nutrition. Maintaining control over food allergies includes the following:

- Strict avoidance of the allergen.
- Reading the ingredient list for all foods is imperative to sustain control over the allergy.
- Cleaning cooking utensils, containers, and grills to avoid cross contamination.
- Making sure all friends, family members, and caregivers are aware of the allergy.

It is possible to become allergic to a food that has previously not caused an allergic reaction. If you or someone around you suffers from swelling of the tongue or throat or difficulty breathing, call 911 immediately.

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