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Allergies: Living With a Food Allergy

A food allergy is caused when the body's immune system mistakes an ingredient in food, usually a protein, as harmful and creates a defense system (antibodies) to fight it. An allergic reaction occurs when the antibodies battle the "invading" food. Although a person could have an allergy to almost any food, the following foods account for almost 90% of all food-related allergic reactions:

- [Milk](#)
- [Eggs](#)
- [Peanuts](#)
- [Tree nuts](#), such as cashews and walnuts
- [Fish](#)
- [Shellfish](#)
- [Soy](#)
- [Wheat](#)

Strictly avoiding your trigger foods is the only way to prevent a reaction and maintain control over your food allergy. To make sure you eat a well-balanced diet while avoiding your triggers, talk to a registered dietician. Here are some tips to get your started.

- Work with your healthcare provider to develop a written action plan that outlines what to do in the case of a reaction. Make sure your friends and loved ones know what to do in an emergency.
- Always take worsening symptoms seriously.
- Diversify your diet by eating fruits and vegetables that are more exotic, especially if you are allergic to those that are more common.
- Invest in a cookbook with recipes that cater to your food allergy. In some cases, common food allergens can be easily removed or substituted in recipes.
- Be aware of any changes in how you feel after eating. Recognizing the onset of a reaction allows you to take quick action.

Become Label Savvy

- Read all food labels. Learn alternate names for foods to which you may be allergic. For example, if you are allergic to milk, you need to avoid products that list the following in their ingredients: casein, sodium caseinate, lactoglobulin and nougat. If you are allergic to eggs, check the ingredients for egg whites and albumin.
- Don't take chances. If a food doesn't have a label and you don't know for certain what's in it, or if you're still uncertain after reading the label, contact the retailer or manufacturer, or just don't eat it.

Always Be Prepared

- Be prepared for an emergency. If you have severe allergies and have medication to prevent [anaphylaxis](#), carry your medicine with you at all times in case you accidentally eat a trigger food. If you have an anaphylactic reaction, be sure someone knows to take you to the emergency room.

Get the Facts

Types of Allergies

Tests You Take

Prevention and Treatments

Food Allergies

- [Food Allergy or Intolerance?](#)
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Toolbox

- ▶ [To the Allergies Center](#)

- An organization called "The Food Allergy Initiative" advises people with food allergies to carry a card that lists the foods to which they are allergic. The card can be given to the chef, manager or server prior to ordering food at a restaurant.

Take Note of Hidden Sources of Problem Foods

Allergy-triggers can be found in the least suspecting foods, so keep the following points in mind.

- The same deli meat slicer used to cut meats is likely used to cut cheese products, too. When this is done, small particles of cheese can be transferred to sliced meats.
- To add flavor, some restaurants melt butter on steaks after they have been grilled.
- Casein, a milk protein, is sometimes used in canned meats.
- Eggs are sometimes used to create the foam topping on specialty coffee drinks.
- Some ethnic dishes, such as African, Chinese, Indonesian, Mexican, Thai and Vietnamese foods, contain peanuts or are prepared in areas near peanuts.
- Some beanbags and hacky sacks are filled with crushed nutshells.
- Some labels use the term "may contain" to indicate the possible, but unintentional, presence of foods allergens in their products.

Next: [Living With a Milk Allergy](#)

View the full [table of contents](#) for the Allergy Guide.

Reviewed by the doctors at [The Cleveland Clinic Department of Pulmonary, Allergy and Critical Care Medicine](#).

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SOURCES: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The Food Allergy Initiative.

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