

# Children with Food Allergies What Parents Need to Know



**One in 13 kids**  
has a food allergy.

A **food allergy** occurs when the body's immune system sees a certain food as harmful and reacts by causing one or more symptoms. This is known as an allergic reaction.

Foods that cause allergic reactions are called **allergens**. Even a tiny amount of an allergen can cause a reaction. Allergic reactions usually occur after your child eats a food that she or he is allergic to.

## Be Aware of Food Allergy Symptoms

The type of symptoms and their severity may vary from one reaction to the next. Sometimes allergy symptoms are mild. Other times, symptoms can be severe and result in a serious allergic reaction called **anaphylaxis** (anna-fih-LACK-sis). Anaphylaxis is an allergic emergency that can cause death.

An allergic reaction to a food can involve one or more symptoms of the skin, mouth, eyes, lungs, heart, gut, and brain. Some symptoms of an allergic reaction include:

- Skin rashes and itching and hives
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, or throat
- Shortness of breath, trouble breathing, wheezing (whistling sound during breathing)
- Dizziness and/or fainting
- Stomach pain, vomiting, and diarrhea
- Feeling like something awful is about to happen

Your child's doctor will give you a complete list of possible symptoms. This list of symptoms is also on your written food allergy emergency care plan (see next page).

## Common Food Allergens

Foods reported to cause most food allergic reactions in the United States are:

- Eggs
- Milk
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts, such as walnuts
- Soy
- Wheat
- Shellfish, such as shrimp, crab, and lobster
- Fish

The most common food allergies in infants and children are eggs, milk, peanuts, tree nuts, soy and wheat.

Children may outgrow some allergies (egg, milk, and soy) but may be less likely to outgrow others (peanut, tree nut, fish, and shellfish).

## Have a Doctor Confirm Your Child's Food Allergy

Your child's doctor will need to diagnose food allergy based on your child's symptoms, medical history, physical exam, and test results. The doctor may recommend your child see an allergy specialist to further diagnose and treat the allergy.

## Be Prepared for Anaphylaxis

Work with your child's health care team on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis and how to treat it. Here's how you can be prepared:

- Have a written food allergy emergency care plan, also called an anaphylaxis emergency action plan. Your child's doctor will give you this step-by-step plan on what to do in an emergency.
- Learn how to give your child epinephrine. It's the medicine of choice to treat an allergic reaction or anaphylaxis.
- Epinephrine is safe and comes in an easy-to-use device called an auto-injector. It injects a single dose of medicine when you press it against your child's outer thigh. Your child's health care team will show you how to use it.
- Always have two epinephrine auto-injectors near your child.
- Teach people who spend time with your child how to use the auto-injector device.
- Consider having your child wear or carry a medical alert bracelet to let others know of the allergy.

## Know How to Treat Anaphylaxis

- 1 Follow the steps in your child's emergency care plan** to give your child epinephrine right away. This can save your child's life.
- 2 After giving epinephrine, always call 911** or a local ambulance service. Tell them that your child is having a serious allergic reaction and may need more epinephrine.
- 3 Your child needs to be taken to a hospital by ambulance.** Medical staff will watch your child closely for further reactions and treat him or her if needed.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about managing children's food allergies, please visit:

**KidsWithFoodAllergies.org**

Family education resources, food and cooking resources, recipes, school planning, and connecting online with other parents.

**AAFA.org**

Support group information.

## Take Steps to Avoid Allergic Reactions

The only way to avoid an allergic reaction is for your child to stay away from foods that have caused symptoms. Even traces of an allergen can cause an allergic reaction. For example, people and pets who have eaten an allergen recently can pass it on to your child through their saliva.

Here are some steps you can take:

- **Learn how to read food labels** for ingredients your child is allergic to. Read the label every time you buy a product, even if you've used that product before. Food ingredients in any given product may change.
- **Ask about ingredients in foods** that other people make for your child.
- **Avoid passing allergens to foods that are safe for your child to eat** by washing your hands and your child's hands with soap and water before handling food. Prepare and serve foods with clean utensils and other kitchen items and on clean surfaces.
- **Educate family, friends, and others** who will be with your child about your child's allergies. Be sure to tell your child's school and anyone responsible for your child about his or her food allergies.
- **Teach your child how to manage his or her food allergies.** You can start teaching your child even at a young age. When old enough, teach your child to read labels. Also teach your child how and when to use an epinephrine auto-injector, and to tell an adult if he or she is having an allergic reaction.
- **After the diagnosis, focus on what safe foods your child can have,** rather than what he or she can't have. Start with plain foods with simple ingredients. From there you can look for new recipes that use safe ingredients.