



CENTRAL TEXAS ALLERGY & ASTHMA

Food Allergy

If you have a food allergy, your immune system overreacts to a particular protein found in that food. Symptoms can occur when coming in contact with just a tiny amount of the food.

Unlike other types of food disorders, such as intolerances, food allergies are “IgE mediated.” This means that your immune system produces abnormally large amounts of an antibody called immunoglobulin E or IgE for short. IgE antibodies fight the “enemy” food allergens by releasing histamine and other chemicals, which trigger the symptoms of an allergic reaction.

Food allergy is a serious medical condition affecting up to 15 million people in the United States, including 1 in 13 children.

Although nearly any food is capable of causing an allergic reaction, only eight foods account for 90% of all food allergic reactions in the United States. These eight foods are: **cow’s milk, eggs, fish, peanuts, shellfish, soy, tree nuts and wheat.**

The foods most associated with food allergy in children are cow’s milk, eggs and peanuts.

Children may outgrow their allergic reactions to milk and to eggs. Peanut and tree nut allergies are likely to persist.

The most common food allergens in adults are fruit and vegetable pollen (oral allergy syndrome), peanuts and tree nuts, fish and shellfish.

Symptoms

Allergic reactions to food normally occur within minutes of eating the trigger food, though they can sometimes appear a few hours later. Symptoms of a food allergy include:

- Hives or red, itchy skin
- Stuffy or itchy nose, sneezing or itchy, teary eyes
- Nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps or diarrhea

In some cases, food allergies can cause a severe reaction called anaphylaxis. Signs of this reaction include:

- Angioedema or swelling
- Hoarseness, throat tightness or a lump in the throat
- Wheezing, coughing, chest tightness or trouble breathing
- Tingling in the hands, feet, lips or scalp
- Weak pulse, dizziness, loss of consciousness

In some very rare cases, the reaction may be delayed by four to six hours or even longer.

A specific type of delayed food allergy reaction is called **food protein-induced enterocolitis syndrome (FPIES)**, a severe gastrointestinal reaction that generally occurs two to six hours after consuming cow's milk, soy, certain grains and some other solid foods. It mostly occurs in **young infants** who are being exposed to these foods for the first time or who are being weaned. FPIES often involves repetitive vomiting and can lead to dehydration. In some instances, babies will develop bloody diarrhea. Because the symptoms resemble those of a viral illness or bacterial infection, diagnosis of FPIES may be delayed. Typically children outgrow FPIES by 3 years of age.

Diagnosis

Proper diagnosis of food allergies is extremely important. Studies have shown that many suspected food allergies are actually caused by other conditions such as a food intolerance. Skin tests and blood tests are often ordered to help make the diagnosis. A food challenge under the care of your Allergist Immunologist may also be needed to confirm an allergy.

Food Allergy Treatment & Management

If you are diagnosed with a food allergy, the treatment plan will be to strictly avoid that food. There is currently no cure for food allergies, nor are there medicines to prevent reactions. The most important preventative measure is to avoid coming in contact with food proteins that can cause an allergic reaction.

Read food labels to ensure that you don't eat foods that contain foods to which you are allergic. Always ask about ingredients when eating at restaurants or when you are eating foods prepared by family or friends.

For milder reactions, antihistamines may help relieve symptoms. Be sure to discuss this approach with your allergist / immunologist.

If you have severe allergies to food, be sure to complete an Anaphylaxis Action Plan and carry your autoinjectable epinephrine with you at all times. Use this medication in the event of an anaphylactic reaction. It is important to wear emergency **medical identification** (Medical alert bracelet or other jewelry) at all times.

Patient Resources:

Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE) for patient support. <http://www.foodallergy.org/about>

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology AAAAI.org has a link to "The Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Food Allergy in the United States: Summary for Patients, Families, and Caregivers" .

American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology acaai.org

<http://www.aaaai.org/conditions-and-treatments/allergies/food-allergies.aspx>

<http://www.foodallergy.org/about-food-allergies>

<http://acaai.org/allergies/types/food-allergies>