

## How can I treat my food allergies?

There is no special medicine for food allergies. Some kids outgrow their food allergies when they're older; others have them for their whole life. It is hard to say from now whether or not you will grow out of your food allergy. For now, the best treatment for a food allergy is avoiding the food you are allergic to and any foods that might contain that food. In the beginning, this might be hard, but your parents and your allergist will help you learn which foods you can eat and which foods to stay away from. After a while, you'll become a food expert! Here are a few tips to help you with your food allergies along the way.

- Carry a card with a list of foods that you cannot eat. This will help you know which foods to avoid.
- Learn how to read the labels on foods. Most foods have ingredient labels that list everything included in the food. Any foods that can cause an allergic reaction will be listed near or in the ingredient list. Ask your parents for help spotting which foods you can or cannot eat.
- Talk to your friends about your food allergy. Your friends can help you out along the way and while you learn more about your food allergy, they can too! The more people who know about your food allergy, the better off you are because they can help you stay away from whatever foods give you problems.
- When you go to restaurants with your parents, practice ordering your own meal. Explain to the waiter that you have a food allergy and that is why you cannot eat a certain food. Make sure that whatever dish you order does not contain the food you are allergic to. It is a good idea to carry a chef card. A chef card has a list of the foods you are allergic to and related ingredients. This is a good way to make sure the person cooking your food understands about your food allergy.



### FOOD ALLERGY PROGRAM

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### RESOURCES

For more detailed information about food allergies, visit:

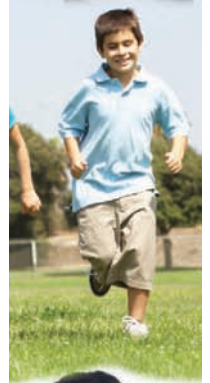
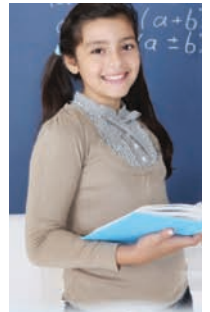
- The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network ([www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org))
- The Food Allergy Initiative ([www.faiusa.org](http://www.faiusa.org))

[www.childrensnational.org](http://www.childrensnational.org)

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YOUR FOOD ALLERGIES



## What is a food allergy?

Normally, your immune (say: ih-myoon) system keeps you healthy. It makes antibodies that help fight off bacteria and viruses that can make you sick. If you have a food allergy, your body makes a mistake and thinks that a certain food is dangerous. So when you eat the food, your body tries to attack it and you have a reaction. The most common foods that people are allergic to are peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, wheat, and soy. If you have a food allergy, you are not alone. There are a lot of kids with food allergies, almost three million in the United States!

## How does the doctor know I have food allergies?

The doctor may begin to think you have a food allergy if you complain of certain symptoms such as your stomach hurting or getting a rash when you eat certain foods. If your doctor thinks you have a food allergy, he or she will send you to a doctor that is an expert on food allergies, called an allergist. The allergist will ask you questions about past reactions or what foods you were eating when you had a reaction. He will also ask about your family to see if anyone else in your family has food allergies.

The doctor may do a skin test. A skin test is used to check which foods are giving you trouble. The doctor or nurse will make a little scratch on your arm with a little liquid from a food. Different foods will go on different scratch spots. The test does not hurt; it's just a little pinch. If you get a red bump on your skin in a spot, it shows you might be allergic to that food.

The doctor may also take a small amount of your blood to test it. The blood sample is sent to a lab where they can see whether your blood shows any signs of allergies to different foods. This is another way to know which foods you are allergic to.

## What happens if I have a reaction?

When you eat a food that you are allergic to, antibodies to something in the food cause cells in the immune system, called mast cells, to release chemicals. One of the chemicals is called histamine (say: his-tuh-mein). Histamine causes the symptoms of an allergic reaction. Some signs of an allergic reaction are:

- ▶ **Skin:** Itchy, red bumps called hives; eczema
- ▶ **Tongue and mouth:** tingling, scratchiness, itching, swelling
- ▶ **Throat:** Hoarse voice, coughing, scratchiness, swelling
- ▶ **Breathing:** Trouble breathing, wheezing
- ▶ **Stomach:** Belly pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

Sometimes your reaction can be mild, but other times it can be more serious. A reaction can happen right after you eat a food or it can happen a few hours later. If a reaction is severe, it is known as anaphylaxis (say: ah-nuh-fuh-lak-sis). With anaphylaxis, several problems can occur all at once, for example, the tongue can swell, breathing passages can get tighter making it harder to breathe, or blood pressure can drop. Anaphylaxis can be scary, but the most important thing is to tell an adult, so you can get medicine as quickly as possible to make you feel better.



## What do I do if I have a reaction?

It is usually a good idea to set up an emergency action plan with your parents and your doctor so you know what to do if you have a reaction. The plan should include what to do and who to tell if you have a reaction. This way, teachers, the school nurse, your friends, your coaches – everyone will know what an allergic reaction looks like and how to respond.

If you start to feel any of the signs of a reaction, find an adult right away. Try to find one who knows about your emergency action plan. If your reaction is mild, they will probably give you an antihistamine medicine, like Benadryl. But if you are having a severe reaction, anaphylaxis, you will need epinephrine (say: ep-uh-nef-rin). Epinephrine is a medicine, which is given by a shot. It comes in a container that looks like a marker. In your plan, you should include who can give you this shot if you need it. After you get an epinephrine shot, you need to go to the emergency room for a few hours so they can make sure that everything is back to normal.

You should have the emergency action plan with you at home and at school, and it should also be brought with you when you stay other places, such as spending the night at a friend's house.

