

Safer Restaurants for your Peanut-Allergic Child

There are some restaurants that tend to be safer for people with peanut allergies. However, this does not mean that they are guaranteed to be safe and it is still important to ask questions and check with the waiter or chef before your child eats there.

- **Fast food chains** - Most of the large fast-food chains are typically safe for people with peanut allergy. However, it is still important to check the ingredients before your child eats there. Also, be aware that several fast food chains use peanut oil for frying.
- **Steak Houses or Seafood Restaurants** - Usually these restaurants are safe because their main foods are meat and fish. However, it is still important to ask about any dressings, sauces, or rubs that may be on the food.
- **American Cuisine** - Most American dishes do not contain peanuts, so in general they are safe. However definitely steer clear of the desserts at these places and still make sure to ask just to be sure!
- **Italian Cuisine** - Pizzas and other Italian dishes are typically safe for people with a peanut allergy, but of course ask before you allow your child to taste.

Alternative Dietary Sources

Peanuts are a good source of protein and several important nutrients such as niacin, folate, pantothenic acid, magnesium, copper, phosphorus, and zinc. However, it is possible to have a diet just as nutritious and peanut-free! There are many other foods that can provide the same nutrition as peanuts. For example:

- **High-protein foods**, such as beans, meat, poultry, fish, and dairy products can be great sources of protein. A serving of any of these can provide 8 grams of protein. Bread and cereal products are also good sources of protein as are fruits and vegetables.
- **Meat** is an excellent source of niacin, pantothenic acid, phosphorus and zinc.
- **Eggs** can provide niacin, phosphorus, and zinc.
- **Whole grains** are a great source of pantothenic acid and magnesium.
- **Milk** can add niacin and phosphorus to a diet.
- **Legumes** contribute folate, pantothenic acid, and magnesium to a diet.
- **Seafood** is a source of copper and zinc.
- **Soy** nut butter is a peanut- and tree nut-free spread, which can be a great alternative to peanut butter. There are also spreads made out of sunflower seeds.



PROGNOSIS AND MANAGEMENT

It is difficult to know what the prognosis of an individual child's food allergy will be. Peanut allergies are less likely to be outgrown than other food allergies. However, recent studies have shown that about 20 percent of people with a peanut allergy eventually will outgrow it. RAST testing can be used to follow the progression of your child's peanut allergy. If IgE levels drop to a certain level, it is possible that a food challenge in a controlled medical setting may be done to determine whether your child has outgrown the food allergy.

If your child outgrows his or her peanut allergy...

If your child successfully passes a peanut challenge, it is important to consult with your allergist about your child eating peanut regularly because not eating peanut on a regular basis may actually be a risk factor for re-developing the peanut allergy! Studies have shown that if a child outgrows a peanut allergy, but continues to avoid peanuts, he or she may be more likely to become allergic to peanuts again.



FOOD ALLERGY PROGRAM

The Food Allergy Program at Children's National Medical Center provides comprehensive services in the evaluation and management of a wide variety of food allergies, including IgE-mediated food allergy, gastrointestinal food allergy, and eosinophilic gastrointestinal disorders.

Food Allergy Program
Children's National Medical Center
111 Michigan Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20010
Phone: 202-476-3016
Fax: 202-476-2280

RESOURCES

For more detailed information about food allergies, visit:

- The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (www.foodallergy.org)
- The Food Allergy Initiative (www.faiusa.org)

www.childrensnational.org

Supported by a grant from the
Children's National Medical Center
Board of Visitors

ALL about PEANUT ALLERGY



OVERVIEW OF PEANUT ALLERGY

Peanuts are one of the most common allergy causing foods, and it is believed that the number of people with peanut allergy is increasing. From 1997-2002, the number of children with peanut allergies doubled! Peanut allergies are considered very serious because peanut reactions are often severe.

Exposures that cause reactions

- **Ingestion** - Eating even trace amounts of peanut can cause severe reactions in people with peanut allergies. The severity of the reaction depends on a number of factors including how sensitive a person is to the allergen, how the food is prepared or processed, and how much of it is ingested.
- **Contact** - It is very important for your child to avoid contact with peanuts. Touching peanuts directly or touching a table with peanut residue can trigger an allergic reaction.
- **Airborne (rare)** - Airborne exposures can cause allergic reactions; however, they are very rare. It is unlikely to get an airborne peanut reaction from sitting next to someone eating peanut butter or candy. Also, peanuts in an outdoor setting such as a baseball game usually do not pose much of a risk. However, when peanuts are being cracked from the shell in an enclosed space with poor ventilation, such as a restaurant or bar, the risk of an airborne reaction increases substantially.

Peanut allergy in siblings of peanut-allergic children

If one of your children has a peanut allergy, there is a slightly increased risk for your other children to have a peanut allergy as well. Studies have shown that 7 percent of siblings of a child with peanut allergy also will be allergic. So, if your other children are not yet eating peanuts, it is important to have them tested beforehand.

Did you know?
The peanut is actually **NOT** a nut.

It is a legume. Legumes include peas, lentils, and soybeans. If your child has a peanut allergy, it is usually not necessary for him/her to avoid other legumes, but of course you should discuss this with your child's allergist. Other legumes can actually be an important source of protein and nutrients for people who cannot tolerate peanuts.

MANAGEMENT OF PEANUT ALLERGY

The only way to prevent the possibility of an allergic reaction is to strictly avoid peanuts. This means not eating peanuts, not eating foods containing peanuts, and not eating foods that might be cross-contaminated with peanuts. This might sound like a daunting task, but the guidelines below will make it easier.

Food labels

This will tell you which foods are safe and which may cause a problem. If a label states that a food contains peanuts, that food should obviously be avoided. It is also a good idea to avoid foods that have precautionary labels, such as:

- May contain nuts
- Produced on shared equipment with nuts and peanuts
- Produced in a facility that also processes nuts.

Cross-Contamination

Peanut cross-contamination occurs when peanut from one source accidentally ends up in a "peanut-free" food. This can happen much more easily than you think. Here are a few examples of things to avoid to make sure your child is safe from cross-contamination:

- Avoid foods that are processed close to or on the same equipment as those that do contain peanut because the risk of peanut contamination is very high.
- When cooking, be sure to wash your utensils well to avoid contamination with trace amounts of peanut that may be left as residue on the utensil.
- Watch for spatulas or serving utensils that may be used between a peanut-containing dish and a "peanut-free" dish. These can have enough residues from the previous peanut-containing food to trigger a reaction.

If you are making a sandwich for one of your children with peanut butter and then use the same knife to make a sandwich for your peanut-allergic child, this can lead to an allergic reaction. Make sure to always clean utensils well, or you may even have a "special" set of utensils for your child with peanut allergy. Some families also decide to keep peanut butter and peanut products out of the house all together when there is a peanut-allergic child living at home.



Unexpected sources of peanuts

- **Cookies and baked goods** - Even if the cookies themselves do not contain peanuts, there is a very high risk for cross-contamination. Also, oftentimes baked goods that do not appear to contain peanuts actually do have peanuts or peanut butter as the "secret ingredient." Ground up peanuts are often added to cookie dough in order to make cookies crunchy. If you are at a bakery that is serving peanut-free cookies, but the server uses the same spatula used to cut a dessert with peanuts, enough peanut can get on the cookie to cause a severe reaction in a peanut-allergic individual. When a person is baking cookies and uses the same mixing bowl or cookie sheet to make the peanut-containing and peanut-free cookies, there is a high risk for cross-contamination.
- **Candy** - It is best to only purchase candy and chocolate from large manufacturers. Smaller producers may not pay as much attention to labeling or may not have a label on their candy. Even if a small candy or fudge shop does not list peanut on the label, there is still a very high risk for cross-contamination.
- **Ice Cream** - As with candy, it is better to only purchase ice cream made by large manufacturers, and it is very important to always check the labels to make sure it is peanut free. It is recommended to avoid ice cream from ice cream parlors because there is a high risk of cross-contamination from the ice cream scoops as well as the toppings. It also is better to stay away from soft-serve ice cream because the ice cream may be served from a machine that contained a peanut flavor the day before.
- **Ethnic cuisine** - Asian dishes, particularly Thai, Chinese, and Indian, often contain peanuts. It is usually best to avoid them. Even ordering a peanut-free dish from one of these restaurants is risky because of the possibility of cross-contamination. Be cautious of African, Mediterranean, and Mexican foods as well. It is important to be very careful when dining out at all, but especially in any one of these ethnic restaurants.
- **Vegetarian Dishes** - Vegetarian dishes often add peanuts as a source of protein.
- **Sauces** - Believe it or not, chili, gravy, and even spaghetti sauces can be unexpected sources of peanuts because peanut butter is often added as a thickener.
- **Alternative Nut Butters** -- Alternative nut butters such as soy nut butter or cashew nut butter can be great alternatives to peanut butter for your child. However, when purchasing alternative nut butters, it is important to contact the manufacturer beforehand because these products are often made on the same equipment as peanut butter.
- **Tree Nuts** - It is typically recommended to avoid tree nuts as they are often processed with peanuts and approximately 30 to 40 percent of people who are allergic to peanuts also are allergic to tree nuts.
- **Peanut Oil** - Peanut oil should be avoided by people with peanut allergies. It turns out that most peanut oil is highly purified and therefore safe. However, it's impossible to know whether a given peanut oil is safe or not. So, it is important to check if foods have been fried in peanut oil or if a certain food contains peanut oil. It is better for your child to stay away from these foods.