



What You Should Know About Living With Food Allergy

If you are reading this, chances are you have been diagnosed with a food allergy. As you may know, to successfully manage your food allergies, your diet and lifestyle must change. While these changes may seem challenging and overwhelming at first, over time things will get easier.

This handout highlights daily activities food allergy may impact. It will help you learn what to consider to avoid an allergic reaction.

Finally, keep in mind that you are not alone - an estimated 11 million Americans are living with food allergies. If you have any questions after you read this information, please call The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) office at 800-929-4040 or visit their website at www.foodallergy.org. They are there to help you.

There is no cure for food allergies. Just one little bite of allergy-causing food can cause a reaction. Strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food is the only way to prevent a reaction.

Living With Food Allergy - Planning in advance how to handle certain situations, reading labels vigilantly, and following avoidance strategies are key to maintaining control over a food allergy. Here are some areas you will need to think about, and plan for, to avoid a reaction.

Grocery Shopping - Grocery shopping will take extra time because each food ingredient statement must be carefully read. Some manufacturers currently use scientific terms to indicate an allergy-causing ingredient. For instance, “albumin” and “lysozyme” are egg-containing ingredients; “casein” and “whey” indicate milk. Additionally, natural and artificial flavors and spices may contain common food allergens.

The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act requires manufacturers to use simple language (i.e. “egg” and “milk”) and to list allergens if they are present in colors, flavors, or spices in products manufactured on or after January 1, 2006. It will take more than one year for all products to have simple language on their labels. Until then, you must learn the scientific names for the food to which you are allergic and call manufacturers to ask about unfamiliar ingredients.

Read the labels on cosmetics and bath products (soaps, lotions, etc.), too, since these items may contain common allergens such as milk, egg, or wheat.

Cooking - Care must be taken in the kitchen to avoid contact with allergy-causing ingredients. This can occur in a number of ways, such as splatter from allergy-containing foods to allergy-free foods or “cross contact” (when one food comes in contact with another food, causing their proteins to mix; as a result, each food then contains small amounts of the other food).

Cross contact could happen when a knife that is used to spread peanut butter, and only wiped clean, is used to spread jelly. In this example, individuals with a peanut allergy may have an allergic reaction when they eat the jelly. All equipment or utensils should be cleaned with hot, soapy water before being used to prepare allergy-free food.

Dining Away From Home - Hidden ingredients and cross contact are common causes of reactions in restaurants, according to a study of peanut and tree nut allergic reactions in restaurants.

If you choose to dine away from home, be vigilant about verifying ingredients and preparation methods. Speak to the restaurant manager about menu items. Use a “chef card” listing the ingredients you must avoid so you can inform kitchen staff of your food allergy. For a free card template, visit www.foodallergy.org/downloads.html

Schools, Child Care, and Camps - If your child has a food allergy, it is important to work with school and camp staff and child care providers to plan for how the food allergy will be managed and how an allergic reaction will be recognized and treated.

Carrying Medicine - Allergic reactions are never planned. If your doctor has prescribed medication such as epinephrine (EpiPen or Twinject), carry it with you at all times. Ask your doctor for a written plan that outlines when and how to use your medicine. For a free Food Allergy Action Plan (FAAP), visit www.foodallergy.org/downloads.html

Convincing others that food allergy is real is often the most challenging part of living with a food allergy. If you or your child has a food allergy share this information with family and friends so that they can better understand the precautions you must take.

Food Allergy Basics (Statistics based on U.S. data only)

- Approximately 11 million Americans suffer from food allergy, with 6.5 million allergic to seafood and 3 million allergic to peanuts or tree nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans, etc.).
- Eight foods account for 90% of all food-allergic reactions in the United States. They are milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, wheat, soy, fish and shellfish.
- Food allergy is the leading cause of anaphylaxis (a severe, potentially fatal allergic reaction) outside the hospital setting, causing about 30,000 emergency room visits per year.
- Approximately 150 to 200 people die annually from anaphylaxis to food, including children and young adults.
- Approximately 2 million school-aged children have food allergy.
- One in every 20 children under 3 years old has food allergy.
- Teens and young adults with peanut or tree nut allergy and asthma appear to be at increased risk for severe or fatal allergic reactions.