

## FOOD ALLERGIES 101

Allergies to cats, dogs, and ragweed, while uncomfortable, are usually not major medical problems as the reactions are limited to sneezing and watery eyes. Allergies to foods can cause anaphylactic reactions such as hives, nausea, closing of the breathing passages, and even death.

A food allergy develops when the body's immune system becomes misdirected and attacks harmless food proteins.

More than 11 million Americans have food allergies of varying degrees of severity, at least 8% of children less than 3 years of age and 2% of adults in the United States. More than 6.5 million adults are allergic to seafood and over 3 million children are allergic to peanuts and tree nuts. The number of children with peanut allergies has doubled in the past five years. Food allergies affect children and adults of all races and ethnicity, and can develop at any age.

**Most importantly, hundreds die from food allergies each year and over 30,000 receive lifesaving treatment in emergency rooms each year.**

While any food can cause allergies, 90% of all food allergic reactions are caused by:

- Egg
- Shellfish
- Peanut
- Fish
- Soy
- Wheat
- Milk
- Nuts from trees (e.g. walnut, pecan)

Food allergies differ from other allergies because even a minuscule amount of the wrong food can be fatal. Dangerous trace amounts of the offending food in poorly labeled processed foods, on cross-contaminated utensils and carried on the hands of others pose a constant threat to those battling food allergies.

Children and adults who suffer food allergies must be forever vigilant. They often carry multiple doses of epinephrine in case of accidental ingestion. At present, epinephrine is the primary emergency treatment available to reduce the symptoms of anaphylaxis, and it can only buy time in the race for proper medical attention.

Food allergy can be responsible for chronic diseases such as eczema and can stunt growth in infants and children by damaging the digestive system.

There is no cure for food allergy; only strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food can prevent an allergic reaction.

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