



PEANUT ALLERGY

If you are allergic to Peanut...

What does a peanut allergy mean?

Peanut allergy is one of the most common, serious and potentially fatal food allergies. It is an immune response (involving the IgE antibodies) to peanut protein, causing the release of histamine chemicals in the body which result in a host of symptoms. Anaphylaxis is a severe IgE antibody triggered reaction which requires urgent medical attention and the administration of epinephrine to stop the reaction.

Studies show that there has been a sharp increase in peanut allergies over the last 5-10 years, particularly in children, not only in the US but in Australia and the UK. A common question is why? Although no definitive answer is available, there are several theories: that we introduce peanuts to children too early; the increased use of soy in formula and other processed food (soy and peanut are both beans); and the use of roasted peanuts in food (heating changes the protein which the body is more likely to react to), rather than raw/boiled peanuts. Another common theory is the hygiene hypothesis which believes that our immune systems have little to fight anymore because we live in a cleaner, healthier, antibacterial world and therefore, the immune system reacts to certain food proteins and mistakes them for a threat. A lowered immune function due to increased antibiotic use, vaccinations, high processed food and pesticide use are also factors to be considered. Symptoms of a peanut allergic reaction can occur immediately or over a period of up to two hours. Peanut allergy reactions can be unpredictable and caution is always required. Peanut allergy symptoms affect various systems of the body and include:

- Hives/urticaria/wheals (small raised itchy areas likened to bites)
- Itchy red skin, rashes
- Congested runny nose
- Pain in the stomach, vomiting, nausea, diarrhea
- Swelling/edema of the lips, skin tongue and airways (causing constriction, wheezing and difficulty breathing)
- Shock (as blood pressure drops and the blood struggles to pump blood around the body)

The smell of peanuts or even second hand contact like kissing or shaking hands with someone else who has eaten a peanut product has been reported to produce an allergic reaction. People with severe peanut allergy are at risk of suffering anaphylactic shock.

Peanut (*Arachis hypogaea*) is actually a bean/legume vine plant that grows underground. It is related to other beans (such as peas, beans and lentils) but it is probably unnecessary to avoid them unless your doctor tells you otherwise. It is more common for someone with peanut allergy to react to nuts from trees, particularly almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, Brazil nuts, or cashews. However, some peanut allergic patients find they can eat these nuts without a problem. Please consult and follow your doctors advice.

Read Labels Carefully!

If you see any of the following items listed as an ingredient in a food, it will not be peanut free.

- Peanut / may contain traces of peanuts
- Cold-pressed or expeller pressed peanut oil
- Ground nuts
- Mixed nuts
- Peanut butter
- Peanut starch
- Beer nuts
- Arachis
- Gianduja
- Goober peas or nuts
- Mandalona (a nut substitute derived from peanut meal)
- Peanut flour
- Peanut oil

Peanut can be found in many foods in different forms, as an emulsifier or thickening agent, i.e., (in prepared foods, fried prepared foods, battered foods and roasted chickens may contain peanut oil). Candy – peanut ingredients may be found in candy and it is best to use only wrapped candy where you can read the ingredient label. Asian cuisine has a high percentage of foods made with peanut or peanut derivatives. Hydrolyzed vegetable protein or plant protein may contain peanut. Vegetable oil / hydrogenated vegetable oil (label may not specify that oil may be a combination of oils and may contain peanut oil)

Common Sources / Foods Containing Peanut

Asian foods
Baked goods – breads, muffins, pastries, cookies
Baking mixes
Cereals
Granola
Crackers
Chili
Ice cream
Mortadella
Nut butters
Sauces (peanuts often used as a thickener)
Soups (mostly dried)
Egg rolls
Vegetarian burgers
Marzipan
Nougat
Chocolate
Flavoring
Milk formula
Pesto
Seasoning
Satay sauces
Chocolate ice cream
Nutella spread

***As always, use extra precaution when eating out at restaurants or eating foods prepared by others.**