

## Peanut Allergy

The prevalence of peanut allergy is on the rise. In fact, the prevalence among young children has recently doubled, with 1 in 200 children having peanut allergy before age four. Approximately 20 percent of children will outgrow their allergy to peanuts, which means that many adults, teens, and adolescents have a peanut allergy.

So why do some people have peanut allergy? We don't know exactly why, but you are more likely to have a food allergy if someone in your family also has one. When someone has a food allergy to peanuts, his or her body tends to "misfire" when exposed to peanuts. Instead of treating a peanut like any other food, the body reacts as if the peanut is harmful. In an attempt to protect the body, the immune system produces antibodies (chemicals designed to fight infection) against the peanuts. This immune system process results in the signs and symptoms of food allergy, which may include:

- ◆ runny nose,
- ◆ hives,
- ◆ increased saliva,
- ◆ stomach pain,
- ◆ nausea,
- ◆ vomiting,
- ◆ diarrhea,
- ◆ coughing,
- ◆ wheezing,
- ◆ tingling of the tongue or lips,
- ◆ swollen tongue or lips,



- ◆ hoarse voice,
- ◆ tightness in the throat,
- ◆ profuse sweating,
- ◆ shallow pulse or shallow breathing (difficulty breathing), and/or
- ◆ changes in skin color (flushing, loss of color, blue or purplish tint to lips or fingernails).

In the most serious cases, anaphylaxis may occur, where the person cannot breathe due to swelling of the tongue and/or throat and/or dangerous drops



in blood pressure. Any or all of these symptoms indicate a medical emergency and require immediate medical attention, which may include the administration of liquid antihistamine (such as Benadryl) or a shot of adrenaline (known as an Epi-Pen). If you know that your child has a peanut allergy, it is important to be prepared with a plan and to have the appropriate medications on hand at all times. Talk with your doctor about making a plan (see the Food Allergy Action Plan at <http://www.foodallergy.org/actionplan.pdf>).

There is no cure for food allergy. The only way to prevent food allergy is to strictly avoid the offending food—in this case, peanuts. Avoiding the offending food requires that you carefully read food labels and communicate the food allergy information with

### Obvious & Not-So-Obvious Sources of Peanuts

#### Peanut products:

- \* Cold-pressed or expressed peanut oil
- \* Peanut butter
- \* Peanut flour

#### Foods containing peanuts:

- \* Ground nuts & mixed nuts
- \* Artificial nuts
- \* Nougat
- \* Salad dressing
- \* African, Chinese, Thai & other ethnic dishes
- \* Cookies, pastries & other baked goods
- \* Ice cream & frozen desserts

#### \* Egg rolls

- \* Marzipan
- \* Energy bars
- \* Cereals & granola
- \* Grain breads

#### Ingredients to look for:

- \* Hydrolyzed plant protein
- \* Hydrolyzed vegetable protein

those who prepare your food. For parents with peanut-allergic children, this requires educating your child's school, care providers, and others who spend time with your child.

### Cross Contamination

Cross contamination is one of the biggest problems with avoiding peanuts. Cross contamination occurs when something used on peanuts—such as a knife used in peanut butter—is not thoroughly cleaned before coming in contact with a non-peanut containing food, such as jelly. If the peanut-allergic person spreads jelly on his/her toast with that knife, the person could have a serious reaction. Although cleaning the knife may seem like a simple solution, the problem is much greater than it appears. Many products are processed by manufacturers using the same equipment that is used to process peanuts. For example, many chocolates are processed in factories where peanuts have also been processed. Most tree nuts (which, by the way, are legumes—not really nuts) are processed using the same equipment as peanuts. For this reason, your doctor may ask that you avoid all nuts—not just peanuts—as well as some other foods known to be commonly processed around peanuts.

Travel, restaurants, and cafeterias may also bring about cross-contamination problems. Many airlines serve peanut-containing snacks. Residue from these snacks may be left behind on the seat from the previous passenger, which may result in a reaction. For some people, even inhaling peanut residue in the air can bring about a reaction. Restaurants and school cafeterias can pose similar problems, where others have eaten peanut-containing foods and left the residue behind on the table. For this reason, your child may be assigned a special table in the school cafeteria to reduce their risks.



### Emotions and Food Allergies

Another very important but often overlooked issue is the emotional side of food allergy. Children who have food allergy often feel left out. Social isolation

for teens can be devastating. Teens take risks, often due to social circumstances. For the food-allergic teen, these risks can be fatal. Talk with your teen about his/her food allergy.



Problem solve with them regarding how to carry medications, how to react in an emergency, and how to educate their friends about their peanut allergy. Set limits for your teenager (e.g., you must show you have your Epi-Pen with you in order to get the car keys). Applaud and encourage your teen's responsible behavior with positive praise and trusting words.

Here are some other tips from the Nemours Foundation that can help your kids to stay safe while they're away from home:

- ◆ If you're staying at a friend's house, bring some of your own "safe" food.
- ◆ Make your own lunches. Try veggie wraps, meat sandwiches, or fruit and cream cheese sandwiches.
- ◆ Use and encourage others to use an antiseptic hand wash after meals.
- ◆ Avoid fried foods (especially in restaurants and fast-food places) that may be made with peanut oil.
- ◆ Consult with a dietitian to come up with safe but delicious meals and snacks.
- ◆ Carry a list of foods to watch out for in your backpack or bag.
- ◆ Put some safe foods in your backpack for a quick snack that does not need to be checked.
- ◆ Become an avid label reader. Check the ingredient list and any processing description, such as "this product was manufactured alongside a product that contains peanuts."
- ◆ Use the manufacturer's toll-free phone number if you have questions about the ingredients contained in your favorite foods.

Having a peanut allergy can be frustrating, but it doesn't have to keep you from participating in most activities. Learning strategies for avoiding peanuts will help those with a peanut allergy to live a full, safe life.

## Sources

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