

Fact Sheet: Food Allergens

Food allergies are abnormal responses of the immune system, especially the production of allergen-specific IgE antibodies to naturally occurring proteins in certain foods that most individuals can eat safely. Frequently such reactions occur because the presence of the allergenic substance in the food is not declared on the food label.

Only about 1.5 percent of adults and up to 6 percent of children younger than 3 years in the United States--about 4 million people--have a true food allergy, according to researchers who have examined the prevalence of food allergies.

It's critical for people who have food allergies to identify them and to avoid foods that cause allergic reactions. Some foods can cause severe illness and, in some cases, a life-threatening allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) that can constrict airways in the lungs, severely lower blood pressure, and cause suffocation by the swelling of the tongue or throat.

While it is generally believed that nearly every food or food ingredient could potentially cause an adverse reaction; eight foods are known to cause ninety percent of severe life-threatening reactions. These are peanut, eggs, milk and milk by products, wheat, tree nuts, soy, fish and shellfish.

Common Symptoms of an Allergic Reaction to Food:

- Symptoms typically appear within minutes to two hours after a person has eaten the food to which he or she is allergic.
- Tingling sensation in the mouth
- Swelling of the tongue and throat
- Difficulty breathing
- Hives
- Vomiting
- Abdominal cramps
- Diarrhea
- Drop in blood pressure
- Loss of consciousness, and death.

Courtesy of US Food And Drug Administration (FDA)