



# Food Allergies

Food allergies have increased by 18 percent in recent years. Learn more about allergies to better serve the children you work with.

## Definitions

Food Allergy is when the immune system mistakes a harmless food protein (the allergen) as a threat and attacks it. The immune response occurs repeatedly upon exposure to the given food.

Food Intolerance or Sensitivity is not the same as a food allergy. It does not involve the immune system or cause death. It does, however, affect the GI system and cause discomfort.

Food Aversion is when someone doesn't like a food for a certain reason.

• About 4% of adults and 5% of children have food allergies.  
• The most common allergies for children are milk, eggs, and peanuts.

## Common Food Allergy Symptoms

Allergic reactions to food usually occur within minutes of eating a food, but can occur hours after. Look for these symptoms:

Gastrointestinal - itchy mouth or throat, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea

Eyes - itchy, watering, swelling

Skin - hives, swelling, eczema

Respiratory - swelling lips and throat, wheezing, repetitive cough, runny nose

Anaphylaxis - several of the symptoms above and may include difficulty breathing, drop in blood pressure, or loss of consciousness



## Reading Food Labels

Food labels are required to alert you of allergens in the food. You can find warnings on the ingredient list or a statement on the package. Examples include “contains milk” on the package or “albumin (egg)” in the ingredient list.

Food labels are not required, but often have precautionary statements if the food was processed with allergens. Look for statements such as “may contain” or “made on equipment that manufactures”.

**Carefully read all labels to ensure the food is free of allergens and safe to eat.**



Teach children with allergies which foods are unsafe, how to read food labels, symptoms of an allergic reaction, and what to do if they start to experience symptoms.



## Anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis is a serious, life-threatening reaction to an allergen. Strict avoidance of the allergic food reduces the risk of anaphylaxis. Usually people with food allergies are prescribed epinephrine in case of accidental ingestion of the allergen. If the children you serve are experiencing anaphylaxis or you suspect they are, immediately give epinephrine (EpiPen) and seek medical attention (9-1-1).

## Recognizing an Allergic Reaction in Children

Beside seeing physical symptoms, listen to the children. They may describe a reaction in one of these ways:

- My tongue is hot and burning.
- My mouth itches.
- My mouth feels funny.
- My tongue feels like there is hair on it.
- There's something stuck in my throat.
- My tongue feels heavy.
- My lips feel tight.
- My throat feels thick.
- It feels like a bump is on the back of my tongue.

In younger children look for changes in the child's voice such as becoming squeaky, hoarse, or slurring words. Young children may put their hands in their mouths or pull on or scratch their

The severity of previous reactions cannot determine how severe the person's next food-allergic reaction will be.

For more information on food allergies, visit these websites:

[www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org)

[www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)

[www.cofargroup.org](http://www.cofargroup.org)

[www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/foodallergy](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/foodallergy)

- Most children eventually outgrow milk, egg, soy, and wheat allergies.
- Outgrowing a food allergy may not occur until the teenage years.
- Children are much less likely to outgrow a peanut and tree nut allergy.



Jan 2014

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### Association for Child Development

[www.acdkids.org](http://www.acdkids.org)

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