

What is the best treatment for food allergy?

Strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food is the only way to avoid a reaction. It is critical that you learn how to read ingredient labels to avoid the allergy-causing food. If your doctor recommends medication, such as antihistamines or epinephrine to control reactions, be sure to carry it with you at all times. Keep both your allergist and your primary care doctor up-to-date on any new developments.

Is there a cure for food allergies?

Currently, there is no cure for food allergies. Many people outgrow their food allergies, though allergies to peanuts, nuts, fish, and shellfish are often considered to be lifelong. Research is being done, however, to find a cure or prevent allergies from developing. The studies look promising.

Additional INFORMATION

For more information about food allergies, contact:
The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network
10400 Eaton Place, Suite 107
Fairfax, VA 22030-2208
Phone: (800) 929-4040
Fax: (703) 691-2713
Website: <http://www.foodallergy.org>
E-mail: faan@foodallergy.org

Write to us or visit our website for a list of other publications that may be of interest to you, including our *Food Allergy News Cookbook*, vols. 1 and 2; "How to Read a Label" cards; and educational books, programs, and videos.

The following organizations may also be sources of useful information:

[American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology](#)
(800) 842-7777
www.allergy.mcg.edu

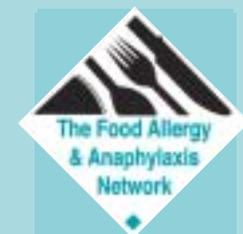
[American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology](#)
(800) 822-2762
www.aaaai.org

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ACAAI American College
of Allergy, Asthma
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Do
YOU
have a

**FOOD
ALLERGY?**



What is the difference between a food allergy and a food intolerance?

An adverse reaction to a food can be the result of either a food allergy or a food intolerance. Many people think these two terms mean the same thing, but they do not.

A food allergy occurs when the immune system mistakenly believes that a food is harmful. In its attempt to protect the body, it creates specific immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibodies to that food. The next time the individual eats that food, the IgE antibodies sense it and signal the immune system to release massive amounts of chemicals and histamines. These chemicals trigger allergic symptoms that can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin, or cardiovascular system. A severe allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis.

A food intolerance is a metabolic disorder; it does not involve the immune system. Lactose intolerance is a common example. A person with lactose intolerance lacks an enzyme that is needed to digest milk sugar. When the individual eats milk products, symptoms such as gas, bloating, and abdominal pain may occur.

What foods cause food allergy?

Although any food could potentially cause a reaction, eight foods are responsible for up to 90 percent of all food-allergic reactions. They are milk, eggs, peanuts, soy, wheat, tree nuts (such as almonds, pecans, Brazil nuts, etc.), fish, and shellfish.

What are the symptoms of food allergy and anaphylaxis?

Symptoms can include:

- a tingling sensation in the mouth
- swelling of the tongue and throat
- rash
- eczema
- hives and swelling
- vomiting
- abdominal cramps
- diarrhea
- wheezing
- difficulty breathing
- drop in blood pressure
- loss of consciousness
- and (very rarely) death

Symptoms typically appear within minutes to two hours after a person has eaten the food to which he or she is allergic.

Let your doctor know if you have any of these symptoms shortly after eating—even if the symptoms are mild and go away shortly after they begin.

How is food allergy diagnosed?

Diagnosing a food allergy takes a team effort between you and your allergist or primary care doctor. To help diagnose food allergy, it is essential for you to describe to your doctor the symptoms you experience and the foods you think may be

causing those symptoms. It may be helpful to write down the following: the symptoms felt, how soon they came on and how long they lasted after eating, the food or foods eaten prior to the onset of symptoms, the amount of each food eaten, and whether similar reactions have occurred before.

There are two tests most commonly used to begin to determine if an allergy exists—a prick skin test or a blood test, such as a RAST (radioallergosorbent test), or a CAP ELISA (enzyme linked immunosorbent assay).

A prick skin test can be done in the doctor's office. The doctor places a drop of the substance being tested on your forearm or back and pricks the skin with a special needle-like instrument, allowing a tiny amount to enter the skin. If you have allergic antibodies to the substance, swelling will form at the site within about 15 minutes.

A blood sample is needed for the RAST or CAP ELISA. The sample is sent to a medical laboratory where tests are done with specific foods to determine whether you have IgE antibodies to those foods. The results are usually received within one week or so.

Both of these tests can only indicate whether IgE is present. Therefore, your doctor must combine the test results along with your medical history to make a food allergy diagnosis.