

How to Avoid Cross-Contact



FARE
Food Allergy Research & Education

What is cross-contact?

Cross-contact happens when one food comes into contact with another food and their proteins mix. As a result, each food then contains small amounts of the other food. These amounts are so small that they usually can't be seen.

Even this tiny amount of food protein has caused reactions in people with food allergies!

The term "cross-contact" is fairly new. Some people may call this "cross-contamination."

Why don't we use the term cross-contamination?

Cross-contamination usually refers to bacteria or viruses that get on food and make it unsafe to eat. In cross-contamination, cooking the food will lower the chance of a person getting sick.

This is not the same with food allergies and cross-contact. Cooking does not remove an allergen from a food!

The only way to stop you from having a reaction is to avoid the food and carefully clean anything that came in contact with it using soap and water.

Examples of cross-contact

Direct Cross-Contact (allergen was directly applied and then removed)	Indirect Cross-Contact (allergen was not directly applied)
Peeling cheese off a cheeseburger to make it a hamburger	Using the same spatula that flipped a cheeseburger to flip a hamburger
Removing shrimp from a salad	Not washing hands after handling shrimp before making the next salad
Scraping peanut butter off a piece of bread and using it to make a different sandwich	Wiping off—not properly cleaning—a knife used to spread peanut butter before using it to spread jelly

Tips to avoid cross-contact

- Use utensils, cutting boards and pans that have been thoroughly washed with soap and water. Consider using separate utensils and dishes for making and serving safe foods. Some families choose a different color to identify the safe kitchen tools.
- If you are making several foods, cook the allergy-safe foods first.
- Keep the safe foods covered and away from other foods that may splatter.
- If you make a mistake, you can't just remove an allergen from a meal. Even a small amount of cross-contact makes a food unsafe.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before touching anything else if you have handled a food allergen. Soap and water or commercial wipes will remove a food allergen. Sanitizing gels or water alone will not remove an allergen.
- Scrub down counters and tables with soap and water after making meals.
- Do not share food, drinks or utensils. Teach children not to share these when they are at school or with friends.