



# Traveling to Spain With Food Allergies

Food allergies don't have to stop you from traveling. Whether traveling for business or pleasure, careful preparation and communication will help make your trip safe and enjoyable. This guide provides some helpful tips while traveling to Spain as well as more information on understanding food labels and dining out at restaurants.

## Medication

Bring a kit with all your medications, including extra epinephrine auto-injectors (EAs). In Spain, epinephrine is called "adrenalina." The patient advocacy organization AEPNAA also recommends carrying an emergency care plan that outlines recommended treatment in case of an allergic reaction, is signed by a physician and includes emergency contact information. You can order a free copy of AEPNAA's Anaphylaxis Emergency Action Plan in English or Spanish at [aepnaa@aepnaa.org](mailto:aepnaa@aepnaa.org). Be sure to bring extra copies with you and keep your plan in a place where others can find it. It is important that you and your travel companions understand what to do in case of an emergency. Ask your doctor to write prescriptions that you can carry with you. Epinephrine auto-injectors available in Spain include Altellus® by Meda Pharma, (identical to Epipen®), Jext® by ALK Abelló, Anapen® by Bioprojet Pharma and Emerade® by Bausch + Lomb. Note that EAs in Spain come regularly as single packs – for two EAs you need two prescriptions.

Understand policies for carrying medication on board the aircraft. In Spain, passengers are allowed to bring their epinephrine or medication on board the aircraft, as well as food for special diets. However, you may need to show the printed label that identifies the medication (please, pay attention to security tips regarding carrying liquids). It is recommended that you also show the prescription label from the pharmacy. Carry with you a Travel Plan completed by your doctor that confirms your food allergy and travel requirements. The Travel Plan of the International Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Alliance may be downloaded at [foodallergy.org/travelplan](http://foodallergy.org/travelplan).

## Emergencies

Always keep your epinephrine with you so it's easily accessible in the event of an emergency. Let your travel companions know about your allergies so they know what to do in case of an emergency and where your auto-injectors are.

**In the event of an emergency, administer epinephrine immediately.** It is critical not to delay epinephrine. After administering epinephrine, **contact emergency services by calling 1-1-2.** Not all ambulances in Spain are equipped with epinephrine and medical staff. Be sure to inform the dispatcher that you're suffering an "Anaphylaxis" when reporting the reaction, so that an ambulance with adequate human resources and equipment is sent to you. It is important to remain at the hospital for at least four hours for observation because symptoms may return.

Always call 1-1-2 – never drive to a hospital on your own. Be aware of your location so that you can give the dispatcher specific information. The ambulance will typically arrive within a short time, but arrival time will depend upon location.

Although Spain has a public and universal health care system, not everybody is covered by it. Find out if you are covered before you travel. You may want to purchase private insurance prior to coming to Spain. Regardless of coverage, emergency services are guaranteed.

## Understanding Spanish (EU) Food Labels

Reading food labels on packaged food is an important part of managing food allergies and avoiding your allergen. The **Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers - FIR (EU Reg.1169/2011)** requires that 14 major substances causing food allergies or hypersensitivities must be labeled if they, or ingredients made from them, are present in prepacked foods (including alcoholic drinks) or non-prepacked foods. These 14 labeled allergens are cereals containing gluten, crustaceans, eggs, fish, mollusks, nuts, peanuts, soybeans, milk, celery, mustard, sesame, lupin and sulphur dioxide or sulphites exceeding 10 mg/kg or 10 mg/liter, expressed as SO<sub>2</sub>.

---

In EU countries, including Spain, the use of advisory labeling (i.e., precautionary statements such as "may contain," "processed in a facility that also processes," or "made on equipment with") is voluntary and optional for manufacturers. There are no laws governing or requiring these statements, so they may or may not indicate if a product contains a specific allergen.

---

The Top 14 Allergens must always be identified in the ingredient list:	
There must be a clear reference to the name of the substance or product that causes the food allergy or food hypersensitivity	Example: "albumin (egg)", "wheat-flour", "E 322 (soy)"
The allergenic ingredient must be emphasized through a typeset that clearly distinguishes it from the rest of the list of ingredients, for example by means of the font, style or background color	Example: "Milkpowder", " <i>wheat-flour</i> ", " <u>Peanutoil</u> ;"

Please be aware the Top 14 Major Allergens are the most common allergens in Spain / EU, and that they differ from other countries. For example, the U.S. has identified 8 allergens that must be declared on pre-packaged food labels and in Canada, 10 allergens are identified as major allergens.

In Spain / EU the allergenic food and all products thereof – e.g. including oil – must be labelled unless they are explicitly exempt from mandatory labelling, such as refined soy oil. Note that in Spain / the EU only eight specifically named tree nuts are included in mandatory allergen labelling.

Although FIR has made label reading easier, AEPNAA advises those managing food allergies to read all labels on all packages carefully every time and always ask for information about non-prepacked food.

## Snacks and Meals

It is recommended that you travel with non-perishable food that is safe for you to eat in case you are unable to find foods free of your allergen while traveling. If you plan on staying in a hotel, consider staying in one that has a small kitchen or a refrigerator and microwave to store and prepare safe meals and snacks. Dried pasta and allergen-free snack bars are good options. You may be able to purchase some of the same products in Spain as you can back home, but don't assume that the same products manufactured in other countries will contain the same ingredients.



## Dining Out at Restaurants

Since December 2014, FIR requires food business operators (e.g., bakeries, butchers, confectioners, ice-cream parlors, restaurants, hotels and clinics) to provide allergen information on ingredients for non-prepacked food as well. Though the law is implemented in the EU, each member state had the option to choose how allergen information is provided. The Spanish RD 126/2015 establishes that this information can be given either in writing (sign at the food, in the menu, on a board, in a folder or form) or orally. If allergen information is provided orally a written documentation has to be in place that must be easily accessible on request. AEPNAA advises consumers with food allergies always to ask for written allergen information.

However AEPNAA nevertheless advises to plan ahead when dining out with food allergies. Since the implementation of the new law takes time, and many places are not aware of the new law, planning ahead is still important. Consider choosing chain restaurants. Each restaurant is likely to use the same ingredients and prepare foods the same way, and they are usually more allergy-aware. Before you go to the restaurant, there are some steps you can take to see if a particular restaurant is a good choice for you. Some restaurants have websites and post their menus online for you to review ahead of time. You can also call the restaurant and ask to speak to the chef or manager about your food allergies, menu items and meal preparation. We recommend calling during off-peak hours.

Communication between restaurants and customers with food allergies is essential to a safe dining experience. The restaurant manager and wait staff should know about your food allergy. Remind a manager or the head waiter about your allergies before you are seated. In addition to asking a lot of questions about the ingredients and preparation methods, carry a “**chef card**” that outlines the foods you must avoid. Present the card to the chef or manager for review. Chef cards can be downloaded in Spanish for free at [foodallergy.org/file/chef-card-spanish](http://foodallergy.org/file/chef-card-spanish).

When selecting your meal, keep it simple. If you have to ask a lot of complicated questions about the items on a menu, ordering simple fare may be the safest. Be sure to ask what is in your dish and how it's prepared. It's important that the restaurant understands what you are allergic to and that cross-contact must be avoided. You may want to speak to the manager and the chef, just to be sure. Remember, never be embarrassed if you feel you aren't communicating effectively. If the wait staff doesn't seem to understand your situation, always trust your gut and seek out another staff member or manager. Sometimes, the safest choice is to avoid eating, and find a safe meal somewhere else.

## Resources

Order free resources in Spanish language, including Anaphylaxis Emergency Action Plan, at [aepnaa@aepnaa.org](mailto:aepnaa@aepnaa.org):  
Epinephrine Auto-Injectors: [aepnaa.org/alergia/adrenalina.-uso-de-los-autoinyectores-128](http://aepnaa.org/alergia/adrenalina.-uso-de-los-autoinyectores-128)

Find an Emergency Department: [msssi.gob.es/en/ciudadanos/prestaciones/centrosServiciosSNS/hospitales/home.htm](http://msssi.gob.es/en/ciudadanos/prestaciones/centrosServiciosSNS/hospitales/home.htm)

International Travel Plan: [foodallergy.org/travelplan](http://foodallergy.org/travelplan)