

Food allergies

What are food allergies?

Food allergies are characterised by an adverse reaction to a specific food, triggered by a specific response of the immune system, and expressed by specific symptoms. Normally, they start in childhood, but they can begin at any age. Some will disappear as time passes, such as milk or egg allergies, but some tend to remain for life, e.g. a shellfish or tree nut allergy.



How common are they?

Worldwide, around 1% of adults and 2–3% of children have a food allergy. Only eight foods account for 90% of all food allergies. The most common food allergies are:

Children

- Cow's milk
- Eggs
- Peanuts
- Shellfish
- Soy
- Tree nuts
- Wheat

Adults

- Fish
- Peanuts
- Shellfish
- Tree nuts



Tips for managing food allergies in the kitchen

Create a food allergy management plan

This should include at least:

- A training program for kitchen staff on food allergies.
- A guideline for answering guests' questions on allergies.
- Checklists for all common food allergies, which include all food or processed food that contain or may contain the allergen.
- A guideline on what to do if a guest has an allergic reaction.

Ask guests for cross-reactions

Some people who are allergic to a specific food are very likely to also react to another totally different food. For example, people with an egg allergy may also be allergic to chicken, cow's milk or peanuts.

Avoid food or food products that contain the food allergen on the menu

The key to a nearly "allergy-free" menu is to avoid the allergen in any form. However, complete safety in producing an allergy-free menu in a kitchen is not possible.

Read the food label carefully before using a product

Many processed foods are a hidden source of food allergens, such as canned tuna fish, which may contain milk protein, Worcestershire sauce, which includes seafood and wheat, and many marinades contain soy/soybean, wheat or other potential food allergens. Sometimes food allergens are hidden behind different names or designations, e.g. the words "albumin", "livetin" or "ovomuroid" indicate the use of eggs, whereas products such as miso, tempeh, and teriyaki indicate the usage of soy or soybeans.

Avoid fried food in dishes

Oil is often used for many different foods, so cross-contamination is possible.

Be cautious with some kinds of oil, e.g. peanut, tree nuts and fish oil

Although the problem with a food allergy is the protein and not the oil itself, it cannot be guaranteed that oil is sufficiently free of all protein components.

Be careful with equipment and utensils

Equipment (e.g. pans, pots, and woks) and utensils (e.g. knives, spoons, and dishes) may be a source of cross-contamination. Clean thoroughly before using and use fresh ones for each menu.

