What Are Major Food Allergens?

Although more than 160 foods can cause allergic reactions, current Federal law identifies these 9 as the most common allergenic foods, causing 90% of allergic reactions. The law says these foods and any ingredient containing protein derived from them are major food allergens and must be listed on the labels of foods that contain them.

How Major Food Allergens Are Listed

The food source names of all major food allergens must be shown on the label. If the common or usual name of an ingredient, such as buttermilk, identifies the allergen, i.e., milk, the requirement is met. If not, the allergen’s food source name must be shown at least once on the label in one of two ways:

**EXAMPLE 1**
In parentheses following the name of the ingredient.

- lecithin (soy)
- flour (wheat)
- whey (milk)

**EXAMPLE 2**
Immediately after or next to the list of ingredients in a “contains” statement.

Contains: Wheat, Milk, and Soy.

Some foods carry a voluntary “may contain” label statement (e.g. “May Contain Peanuts”) because there is a chance that a food allergen is present. FDA guidance says these statements should not be used as a substitute for following current good manufacturing practices, and must be truthful and not misleading.