



Food Allergies: *What You Need to Know*



Millions of Americans have food allergies and may experience adverse reactions to products that have food allergens. Most reactions cause mild symptoms, but some are severe and may even be life-threatening.

Although new treatments are being [developed](#), there is no cure for food allergies. Medical diagnosis to find out which foods cause an individual to have an allergic reaction and strictly avoiding those foods are important ways to prevent serious adverse health effects.

What Are the Major Food Allergens?

While many different foods can cause allergic reactions, the [Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004](#) (FALCPA) identified eight foods as major food allergens: milk, eggs, fish, Crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans.

On April 23, 2021, the [Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research \(FASTER\) Act](#) was signed into law, declaring sesame as the 9th major food allergen recognized by the United States. The change was effective on January 1, 2023. Even though the requirement that sesame be listed on the label as an allergen is in effect as of January 1, 2023, you still may find food products for sale that don't list sesame as an allergen on the label. Read more about the transition phase at [Allergic to Sesame? Food Labels Now Must List Sesame as an allergen.](#)

1. **Milk**
2. **Eggs**
3. **Fish** (e.g., bass, flounder, cod)
4. **Crustacean shellfish** (e.g., crab, lobster, shrimp)
5. **Tree nuts** (e.g., almonds, walnuts, pecans)
6. **Peanuts**
7. **Wheat**
8. **Soybeans**
9. **Sesame**

Allergen Labeling

The FDA enforces FALCPA in the labeling of foods the agency regulates, which include all foods except poultry, most meats, certain egg products, and most alcoholic beverages (all of which are regulated by other Federal agencies). FALCPA requires that food labels clearly identify the food source names of any ingredients that are one of the nine major food allergens or contain protein derived from a major food allergen. Proper labeling of foods helps allergic consumers identify foods or ingredients that they should avoid.



How Major Food Allergens Are Listed

FALCPA requires that food labels identify the food source names of all major food allergens used to make the food. This requirement is met if the common or usual name of an ingredient (e.g., buttermilk) that is a major food allergen already identifies that allergen's food source name (i.e., milk). Otherwise, the allergen's food source name must be declared at least once on the food label in **one of two ways**:

1. **In parentheses** following the name of the ingredient in the ingredient list.

Examples: "lecithin (soy)," "flour (wheat)," and "whey (milk)"

– OR –

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

Example: "Contains Wheat, Milk, and Soy."

Know the Symptoms of Food Allergies

If you are allergic to a food you have eaten, you may experience a variety of symptoms. These symptoms are not always present or the same for every person or reaction and can vary depending on a number of factors, including the amount of food allergen eaten.

If you are allergic to a food that you have eaten, symptoms may appear from within a few minutes to a few hours.

Symptoms of food allergies (allergic reactions), can include:

- Hives
- Flushed skin or rash
- Tingling or itchy sensation in the mouth
- Face, tongue, or lip swelling
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Abdominal cramps
- Coughing or wheezing
- Dizziness and/or lightheadedness
- Swelling of the throat and vocal cords
- Difficulty breathing
- Loss of consciousness



Food Allergies Can Be Life-Threatening

While most symptoms from food allergies are mild and limited to skin or digestive discomfort, some may progress to a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction called **anaphylaxis**.

This can lead to:

- constricted airways in the lungs
- severe lowering of blood pressure and shock ("anaphylactic shock")
- suffocation by swelling of the throat and larynx

If you have a known food allergy and start having symptoms of an allergic reaction:

- Stop eating the food immediately
- Evaluate the need for emergency treatment (such as epinephrine)
- Seek medical attention

Symptoms of anaphylaxis may start out as relatively mild but, if not treated promptly, symptoms can become life-threatening in a short amount of time.

Recognizing early symptoms of anaphylaxis and prompt injection of the drug epinephrine and other medical care or intervention can help prevent life-threatening consequences.

It is important to understand that a mild allergic reaction does not always mean the allergy is mild. Any allergic reaction has potential to lead to anaphylaxis. Allergic individuals are taught to always monitor symptoms and seek medical care if needed when symptoms occur.

What to Do If Symptoms Occur

The appearance of symptoms after eating certain foods may be a sign of a food allergy. The food(s) that caused these symptoms should be avoided, and the affected person should contact a health care provider for appropriate testing and evaluation.

If you or a loved one has food allergies, use these 4 tips to help reduce your risk of getting sick:

1. Always read food labels.
2. Avoid foods that you are allergic to.
3. Learn to recognize the early symptoms of an allergic reaction, in case of accidental ingestion.
4. Know what to do in case an allergic reaction occurs. Plan to have ready access to the appropriate treatment measures and medical care.



Reporting Adverse Reactions and Labeling Concerns

If you or a family member has had an allergic reaction after eating an FDA-regulated food or food product with unclear labeling or a possible allergen, discuss this with your health care provider. Keep any food packages because they may contain important information. You may want to contact the manufacturer.

Also, report the suspected reaction or labeling concerns to the FDA in one of these ways:

- Consumers and manufacturers can submit reports detailing product reactions or other complaints to an [FDA Consumer Complaint Coordinator](#) for the state where the food was purchased,
- Call FDA at 1-888-SAFEFOOD, or
- [Submit a report](#) using FDA's MedWatch Online reporting form for consumers.

Reports submitted to FDA should include as much information as possible:

- Who is reporting the incident and who was affected? Please provide names, addresses, and phone numbers.
- The name and address of the place where the product was purchased.
- A clear description of the reaction, including:
 - Date the reaction occurred.
 - All symptoms experienced.

FOOD FACTS

- How long after you ate or drank the product that the reaction occurred.
- Medications used to treat symptoms.
- Whether the reaction required further medical care, and if so, what kind. Please provide contact information for the doctor or hospital.
- A complete description of the product, including:
 - Date of purchase.
 - Any codes or identifying marks on the label or container, such as lot number, expiration date, and UPC code.
 - Photos of the product, label, ingredient statement, and lot code.

Consumer reports of adverse events help FDA identify problem products and better protect all consumers.

For more information on food allergies, visit:

<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies>