

Food Allergy Basics



- A food allergy is an immune system response to a food protein that the body mistakenly believes is harmful. When the individual eats food containing that protein, the immune system releases massive amounts of chemicals, triggering symptoms that can affect a person's breathing, gastrointestinal tract, skin, and/or heart.
- Symptoms of food allergy can include; hives, swelling of the lips, tongue, and face; breathing difficulty; wheezing and coughing; abdominal pain; vomiting; and even cause heart failure. If left untreated, these symptoms can be fatal.
- It is estimated that up to 400,000 (2%) Australians, including 1 in 20 children suffer from food allergies and some of them will experience a life-threatening (anaphylactic) reaction.
- There are eight foods that account for 90% of allergic reactions: peanuts, tree nuts (walnuts, almonds, cashews, pistachios, pecans, etc.), fish, shellfish, eggs, milk, sesame and soy.
- Peanuts are the leading cause of severe allergic reactions, followed by tree nuts, shellfish, fish, and eggs.
- Currently, there is no cure for food allergy. Avoidance of the food is the only way to prevent a reaction.
- Adrenaline is the first line treatment for severe allergic reactions and can be administered via auto-injector, called the EpiPen®.
- Food allergy is the leading cause of (severe reactions) anaphylaxis outside the hospital setting.
- Approximately 10 people die from severe food allergic reactions each year in Australia.

Common Myths about Food Allergy

Myth: Food allergies are not real.

Fact: Food allergies are real and involve the body's immune system. With food allergy, the immune system misinterprets a food protein as a harmful invader and releases histamine and other chemicals to protect the body from harm. Symptoms can include hives, swelling, vomiting, diarrhoea, and respiratory distress.

Myth: The terms food "allergy" and "intolerance" mean the same thing.

Fact: Whereas food allergy involves the immune system, food intolerance is caused by an enzyme deficiency. Lactose intolerance is an example. A person with lactose intolerance lacks an enzyme that is needed to digest milk sugar. When the person ingests milk products, symptoms such as gas, bloating, and abdominal pain may occur.

Myth: Food allergies are not life threatening.

Fact: Approximately 10 people die each year due to allergic reactions to food.

Myth: Food additives and artificial flavors cause the majority of food-allergic reactions.

Fact: Contrary to common belief, natural foods account for the majority of allergic reactions. The foods that cause 90 % of allergic reactions are peanuts, milk, eggs, sesame, soy, tree nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts,) fish, and shellfish.

Myth: Each allergic reaction to food becomes increasingly worse.

Fact: The severity of a reaction is based on a number of factors, including the amount of food ingested. An individual with food allergy may experience a mild or severe reaction.

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Every time you eat anything, anywhere, do you wonder if the food is safe?

For people with life-threatening food allergies, each bite is a calculated risk. A wrong decision can be fatal.

- 1 in 20 children suffer from food allergies.
- Fact: Food allergies are real and involve the body's immune system.
- Fact: Almost 400,000 Australians have some type of food allergy. While the exact number is not known, an increasing number of Australians have an allergy that is life-threatening.



What is Anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of allergic reaction and is potentially life-threatening. It must be treated as a medical emergency, requiring immediate treatment and urgent medical attention.

Anaphylaxis Australia Inc

Anaphylaxis Australia Inc (AAI) is national charitable, non-profit organization, which is largely operated by volunteers. It was established in 1993 to support and assist those affected by anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis Australia's mission is to develop anaphylaxis awareness through education, research and support.

**How can you help improve the quality of life of those
with life-threatening allergies?**

CONTACT US: Ph: 1300 728 000 | Fax: 02 9831 1045 | www.allergyfacts.org.au

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