Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

KIDS WITH FOOD ALLERGIES
A Division of the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

Food Allergy Facts and Figures

What Is a Food Allergy?

- A food allergy occurs when the body's immune system sees a certain food as harmful and reacts by causing symptoms. This is an allergic reaction.
- Foods that cause allergic reactions are called **allergens**.
- Allergic reactions can involve the skin, mouth, eyes, lungs, heart, gut, and brain.
- Mild and severe symptoms can lead to a serious allergic reaction called **anaphylaxis** [anna-fih-LACK-sis]. This reaction usually involves more than one part of the body and can worsen quickly.
- Anaphylaxis must be treated right away with epinephrine to provide the best chance for improvement and prevent serious, potentially life-threatening complications.

How Common Are Food Allergies?

- About 32 million people have food allergies in the U.S.[1,2]
  - About 26 million (10.8%) U.S. adults have food allergies.[1]
  - About 5.6 million (7.6%) U.S. children have food allergies.[2]
- In 2018, 4.8 million (6.5%) children under 18 years of age had food allergies over the previous 12 months.[3]
- In 2018, 6% of Black and Hispanic children had food allergies over the previous 12 months, compared to 6.6% of white children.[3]
  - Food allergy has increased among U.S. children over the past 20 years, with the greatest increase in Black children.[4]
- Children with food allergies are two to four times more likely to have asthma or other allergic diseases.[5]

What Are the Most Frequent Food Allergens?

- Nine foods cause most food allergy reactions in the United States:[6]
  - Milk
  - Egg
  - Peanut
  - Tree nut (for example, almonds, walnut, pecans, cashews, pistachios)
  - Wheat
  - Sesame
  - Soy
  - Fish (for example, bass, flounder, cod)
  - Shellfish (for example, crab, shrimp, scallop, clams)
- Sesame is a rising food allergy. It impacts an estimated 1 million people in the United States.[7] It was declared a major allergen in the United States in 2021.

What Is Anaphylaxis?

- Anaphylaxis is a severe, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction. Not all allergic reactions are anaphylaxis.[8]
- Symptoms of anaphylaxis usually involve more than one part of the body such as the skin, mouth, eyes, lungs, heart, gut, and brain.
- Symptoms of anaphylaxis can include:
  - Skin: hives (often very itchy), flushed skin, or rash

  - Mouth: swelling of the lips, tongue, and throat; tingling or itchy feeling in the mouth
  - Lungs: shortness of breath, trouble breathing, coughing, or wheezing
  - Heart: dizziness, lightheadedness, loss of consciousness, low blood pressure, shock[6]
  - Stomach: cramps, vomiting, diarrhea[6]
- Each year in the U.S., it is estimated that anaphylaxis to food results in 90,000 emergency room visits.[8]

How Are Food Allergies Managed and Treated?

- Although new treatments are being developed, there is currently no cure for food allergies.[6]
- Not eating the food allergen is the primary way to prevent a reaction.[6]
- People with food allergies should carefully read food ingredient labels and always ask about ingredients before eating food prepared by other people. [6]
- Epinephrine is the first line of treatment for anaphylaxis.[9]
- People with food allergies should always have epinephrine with them. [9]
- If a person is having anaphylaxis, they should:
  - Follow their **Anaphylaxis Action Plan**
  - Use their epinephrine
  - Get emergency medical care to ensure symptoms resolve[10]

Are Food Allergies Outgrown?

- Milk, egg, wheat, and soy allergies are often outgrown. Most people do not outgrow peanut, tree nut, fish, and shellfish allergies.[11]

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