

FACTS ABOUT PEANUT/NUT ALLERGY

Cause

An abnormal reaction of the immune system to the peanut or nut protein.

Age of onset

Usually occurs during the first year or two of life, or whenever peanuts or nuts are first eaten.

Diagnosis

Should be made by a doctor or an allergist who may use several tools, including:

- Detailed history
- Food challenge
- Skin prick test
- Blood tests

Symptoms

Reactions to a food typically begin within minutes but may also occur (or reoccur) up to two to four hours after eating and usually last less than one day.

Allergic reactions to food can include any of the following symptoms:

Digestion

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Tingling in the mouth
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea

Skin

- Rash
- Itching
- Hives
- Redness
- Eczema
- Swelling
- Change in skin colour

Air Passages

- Runny nose, sneezing
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Coughing, choking, gagging
- Nasal congestion
- Difficulty breathing
- Wheezing



Anaphylaxis

Most peanut/nut allergies are considered potentially anaphylactic. Even a mild peanut/nut allergy can cause anaphylaxis if enough is eaten. Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that involves several parts of the body. It can lead to loss of consciousness and death. **Immediate medical help is necessary. Those at risk should carry epinephrine and wear a "MedicAlert®" bracelet.**

Treatment

- Be prepared. Carry injectable epinephrine (e.g. EpiPen®) if prescribed and know how to use it. Go to a hospital emergency room for follow-up.

• Even very small amounts of peanuts or nuts can cause serious reactions. Complete avoidance of peanuts or nuts, including any food or other product containing peanuts or nuts, is necessary.

- Reading food labels for all foods is the key to maintaining control over the allergy. If the product does not have a label, the food should not be eaten.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can a peanut allergy be outgrown?

Peanut allergy was once considered to be life long. Today, studies indicate that around 20% of children diagnosed with a peanut allergy can outgrow it. To be safe, never re-introduce peanut products in your child's diet without the approval of your allergist.

Can a person react to the smell of peanuts?

The smell of a food such as peanut butter has not been shown to cause allergic reactions. Allergic reactions are triggered by proteins and there is no protein in the smell. Peanut allergic people may feel uncomfortable or even unwell if they smell peanut butter, but this is due to a strong aversion, rather than allergy, and does not require treatment.

Inhaling airborne peanut *particles* can cause allergic reactions, with symptoms such as rashes, runny nose, itchy eyes, and occasionally, wheezing, but anaphylaxis is very unlikely. Airborne peanut dust could occur if peanuts are being shelled in large quantities or if many bags are opened at once. Proteins could also be released during cooking, boiling or processing.

Is peanut/nut oil safe for my child?

Pure refined peanut/nut oil, if properly processed, should not contain peanut/nut protein and therefore should not cause reactions in allergic children. However, peanut/nut oils are also available unrefined. Unrefined oils may be called cold-pressed, unprocessed, expelled or extruded oils. These unrefined oils may have peanut/nut proteins and could cause allergic reactions.



Is coconut a nut?

No, coconut is not a nut and therefore it does not have to be avoided by nut allergic people. Only those allergic to coconut need to avoid products containing coconut.

If I am allergic to nuts, can I eat seeds?

Seeds, such as sesame, sunflower, poppy, mustard, safflower and canola, do not need to be avoided unless you are allergic to them.

What about hydrolyzed vegetable protein?

Hydrolyzed vegetable protein or hydrolyzed plant protein is usually made from soy, wheat or corn. It is rare to find hydrolyzed vegetable protein made from peanuts in Canadian products. Under the current regulations, if it is made from peanuts, it does not have to say so on the food label.

What is cross-contamination and how can it affect my child?

Cross-contamination occurs when a safe food comes in contact with a food allergen such as peanuts or nuts. In industry, cross-contamination may occur when more than one product is made on the same processing or packaging line or when equipment used to manufacture one product containing peanuts or nuts is used to manufacture other foods. At home or in school, children should be wary of jam or butter, which could be contaminated by using the same knife used to spread peanut butter, cookies from a cookie jar that was not washed between batches, doughnuts which may have touched peanut-coated doughnuts and bulk foods that may have been transferred into a bin containing peanut products. Children should always bring their own lunch and not share foods.

ALLERGY/ASTHMA INFORMATION ASSOCIATION

AAIA National Office
1-111 Zenway Boul.,
Vaughan, ON L4H 3H9
Toll free: 1 800 611-7011
Phone: (905) 265-3322
Fax: (905) 850-2070

AAIA B.C./Yukon
Toll free: 1 877 500-2242
Phone: (250) 764-7507
Fax: (250) 764-7587
E-mail: bc@aaia.ca

AAIA Prairie/NWT/Nunavut
Toll free: 1 866 456-6651
Phone/Fax: (780) 456-6651
E-mail: prairies@aaia.ca

AAIA Ontario
Toll free: 1 888 250-2298
Phone: (519) 284-4222
Fax: (519) 284-0384
E-mail: ontario@aaia.ca

AAIA Québec
Toll free: 1 866 694-0679
Phone: (514) 694-0679
Fax: (514) 694-9814
E-mail: quebec@aaia.ca

AAIA Atlantic
Toll free: 1 866 761-6600
Phone/Fax: (506) 459-4475
E-mail: atlantic@aaia.ca

Registered charitable number
131 765 174 RR001

HERSHEY®

Published through
a donation from
Hershey Canada

Hershey Canada Inc.
2350 Matheson Blvd. East,
Mississauga, ON
L4W 5E9
Web site: www.hersheycanada.com

This pamphlet is distributed for general educational, informational and awareness purposes only. It is not intended to replace or constitute medical advice.

Revised 2007

**Allergy
Asthma**
information
association
www.aaia.ca

Peanut and Nut Allergies

The Facts

