

Food allergy

The Health Column

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Australia has one of the highest reported incidences of food allergies in the world, and the numbers are growing at an alarming rate with one in 10 babies born in Australia today forecast to develop a food allergy. This year Food Allergy Week is being celebrated from 14–20 May.

Food allergy is an allergic response to particular foods or food additives. Food intolerance occurs when the body has a chemical reaction to eating a particular food or drink. Unlike food allergies, intolerances do not involve the body's immune system. Food intolerance symptoms include headaches, bloating, wind, nausea, mouth ulcers or hives, and can occur several hours after a food is eaten.



An allergic reaction can quickly become life threatening and people can die from food allergy. It's up to all of us to be allergy aware – to know how to minimise the risk of a reaction, to know what to do if a reaction happens, and to understand and support family, friends and colleagues living with food allergies.

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (A&AA) is a charitable, not for profit organisation whose aim is to improve awareness of allergy in the Australian community. They do this by sharing current information, education, advocacy, research, guidance and support.

The signs and symptoms of a food allergic reaction may occur almost immediately after eating or most often within 20 minutes to 2 hours after eating. Rapid onset and development of potentially life threatening symptoms are characteristic markers of anaphylaxis.

Allergic symptoms may initially appear mild or moderate but can progress very quickly. The most dangerous allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) involve the respiratory system (breathing) and/or cardiovascular system (heart and blood pressure).

Common signs and symptoms of food allergy:

- hives, welts or body redness
- difficult and/or noisy breathing

- swelling of the face, lips, eyes, throat or tongue
- vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea
- tingling of the mouth
- difficulty talking and/or hoarse voice
- wheeze or persistent cough
- persistent dizziness and/or collapse.

Your local pharmacy is your health destination. Pharmacists and pharmacy staff may suggest antihistamines. Ask about any possible side effects (e.g. drowsiness). If the allergy has caused a rash, your pharmacist may recommend an anti-inflammatory cream, such as hydrocortisone cream. Anaphylaxis is preventable and treatable. Knowing the triggers and avoiding them is the first step in preventing an allergic reaction.

Removing allergens from the house makes life much easier for the allergy sufferer; however this isn't always possible, particularly if the allergen is egg or milk, often staple, healthy foods for most of the family. Always read food labels on purchasing foods and then again when about to eat them.

If you do have the allergen in your home, try these tips:

- Wash contaminated kitchen utensils in hot soapy water or in the dishwasher.
- Use disposable paper towelling to wipe surfaces where the allergen has been used to avoid contaminating your everyday sponge or dishcloth.
- If egg allergic, use a sealed labelled container in the fridge to contain foods like mayonnaise, eggs, Pavlova, left over quiche, or muffins.
- Use a labelled basket in the fridge and/or pantry for foods that are safe for the person with a particular food allergy to eat. Place it on the top shelf of the fridge so other foods cannot spill into it.
- Use separate oil for cooking food for the person with a food allergy.

Your doctor may recommend you carry an injectable dose of adrenaline with you at all times. Adrenaline is used in severe reactions and can be a life-saving measure.

The risk of developing food allergies is greater if you have a family history of allergic conditions. If you or your partner has an allergy, your child has a 30 per cent chance of inheriting the allergic gene and therefore could develop eczema, asthma, hay fever or a food allergy. If both parents have a history of some allergic condition, your child has a 40 to 60 per cent chance of having a child with some form of allergy.

It is important to speak to a health professional about any concerns you may have. If you or someone you care for has a reaction to any food, seek medical advice. If you are worried about a serious reaction, call an ambulance or go directly to hospital.

Your local community pharmacy is your health destination and your Self Care pharmacist can teach you how and when to use your adrenaline injector (if your Doctor has recommended one), as well as provide advice on other medicines.

Your Self Care pharmacy has a range of fact cards including ones which cover the topics of *asthma, constipation, heartburn and indigestion, infant colic, irritable bowel syndrome, and vomiting and diarrhoea.*

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au/selfcare, then click 'Find a *Self Care pharmacy* near you'.