

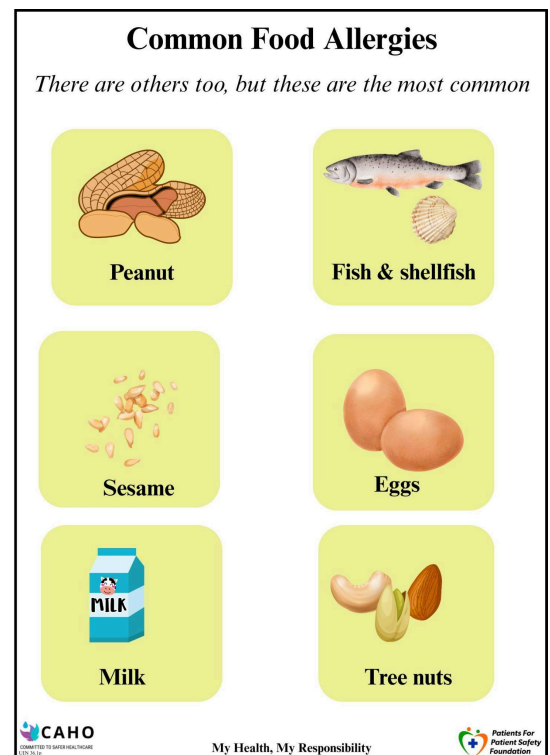
Food allergies occur when your immune system overreacts to certain proteins in food, identifying them as harmful invaders. This triggers an allergic reaction, which can range from mild to severe.

Most Common Food Allergies:

While you can be allergic to any food, the most common food allergies that affect both children and adults.

- Milk (cow's milk protein)
- Eggs
- Peanut, tree nuts, such as walnuts, almonds, cashews, pistachios, pecans,
- Seafood like fish, shellfish, shrimp, crab, lobster, and other crustaceans
- Sesame/ other seeds

There are others as well, but above covers the majority of them.



Why Do Allergy Reactions Happen?

It is not entirely clear why some people develop food allergies. However, it involves your immune system mistakenly identifying a constituent as a threat. When you eat that food, your immune system releases chemicals, like histamine, which cause allergic symptoms.

Food allergies are more common in children and could start at an early stage. For many, the allergies may come later in life. Some outgrow allergies to milk, eggs, and soy as they get older, but allergies to peanuts, tree nuts, fish, and shellfish tend to persist throughout life.

Act fast to an Allergic Reaction:

The actions you take depend on the severity of the reaction. Mild to moderate reactions like itchy skin, hives, mild stomach pain, or sneezing. Over-the-counter antihistamines help alleviate the condition.

Severe Reactions (Anaphylaxis). This is a life-threatening reaction that can involve difficulty in breathing, swelling of the lips, face, tongue, or throat, dizziness or fainting, rapid or weak pulse, severe stomach pain, vomiting, or diarrhoea. In such cases, immediate medical attention is crucial.

Normally, administer epinephrine if you have an auto-injector (like an EpiPen), or ask a trained family member or caregiver to do it for you. In any case, call emergency services right away. You should also keep **oral antihistamines** (like cetirizine or diphenhydramine) at home to manage mild symptoms, prescribed by your doctor. You would know if your allergy had already been diagnosed and your doctor had prescribed SOS medicines.

Difference between a Food Allergy and Food Intolerance?

Food intolerances and allergies are fundamentally different in how your body reacts:

- **Food allergy** is a serious immune system response to a specific food protein, which can cause symptoms such as hives, swelling, difficulty breathing, vomiting, or even life-threatening anaphylaxis. Even a tiny amount of the offending food can trigger a reaction, which can be severe and life-threatening.
- **Food intolerance** involves the digestive system rather than the immune system. It occurs when the body has difficulty digesting or processing certain foods, often due to enzyme deficiencies such as lactose intolerance, gluten intolerance. Symptoms include digestive discomfort, flatulence, bloating, cramps, diarrhoea, and nausea.

How to Diagnose Food Allergy:

If you cannot correlate your symptoms to a specific food, an allergist can help with the diagnosis. Based on your symptoms, medical history, and a physical examination, the doctor may recommend allergy testing, like Skin Prick Test, Blood test and Oral food challenge.

Can I Prevent Food Allergy?

The best way to prevent an allergic reaction is to strictly avoid the food allergen. This involves:

- **Read food labels carefully.** Look for ingredients that contain your allergen and pay attention to the ingredient statements. Do not hesitate to ask details about ingredients and preparation methods.
- **Informed friends and family** know about your food allergies. If you or your child has food allergies, let relatives, babysitters, teachers, and caregivers be informed about which foods to avoid. They should also know the SOS medicine to be given.
- Let your hosts, restaurants, and airlines know about your food allergies and what foods you need to avoid. If you are unsure about a food, do not consume it.
- Always have **prescribed emergency medications** in easy reach
(Do not self-medicate unless advised.)

Currently, there is no definitive cure for most food allergies.

Understanding your symptoms, knowing triggers, avoiding specific foods, and being prepared for emergencies will help you manage allergic reactions effectively.

To know more:

- [Food Poisoning First Aid](#)