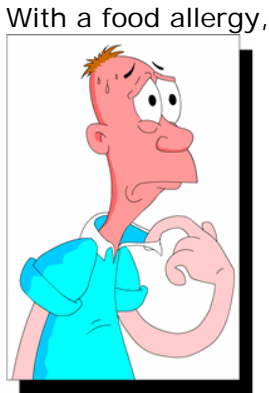


Food Allergies – Facts on a Plate



With a food allergy, the body reacts as though that particular food product is harmful. As a result, the body's immune system creates antibodies to fight the food allergen, (the substance in the food that triggers the allergy). The next time a person comes in contact with that food by touching or eating it or inhaling its particles, the body releases chemicals, including one called histamine, to "protect" itself. These chemicals trigger allergic symptoms that can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin, or cardiovascular system. These symptoms might include a runny nose, an itchy skin rash, a tingling in the tongue, lips, or throat, swelling, abdominal pain, or wheezing.

People could be allergic to any food, but there are eight common allergens that account for 90% of all reactions:

1. milk
2. eggs
3. peanuts
4. tree nuts (such as walnuts and cashews)
5. fish
6. shellfish
7. soy
8. wheat



After diagnosis, your doctor will help you create a treatment plan. No medication can cure food allergies, so treatment usually means avoiding the allergen and all the foods that contain it.

- **Milk:** Avoid cheeses, butter, creams, and yogurt. Also avoid lactose-free milk as well as foods with ingredients such as casein and whey.
- **Eggs:** Avoid cakes, cookies, pastries, mayonnaise, and egg substitutes. Also avoid foods that contain ovalbumin, often abbreviated as Ov. Some fresh pastas and soups may also be prepared with eggs. In addition, the doctor may advise against a flu shot for a child with an egg allergy because the flu vaccine contains small amounts of egg protein.
- **Soy:** Avoid soybeans, soy nut butter, soy sauce, soy protein, soy oil, and tofu. Also avoid any food with lecithin in the ingredients list.
- **Peanuts:** Avoid any food that contains nuts, as well as peanut flour or peanut oil. You will also want to prevent your child from eating Asian foods (which are often cooked in peanut oil), egg rolls, chocolate, confectionary, and any pastries that may contain nuts. If a food's ingredients include

hydrolyzed plant or vegetable protein, avoid it because it may contain peanuts. Although peanuts and tree nuts are two different foods and are not actually related, children who have peanut allergies are advised to avoid tree nuts (and vice versa) because about 30% react to both allergens.

- **Tree nuts:** Avoid almonds, Brazil nuts, walnuts, pecans, cashews, and macadamia nuts. You'll also want to keep your child away from nut butters or any product that mentions nuts in the ingredients list, including ice cream or crackers, unless you know them to be nut-free.
- **Shellfish:** Avoid crab, lobster, shrimp, snails, clams, and oysters, as well as other types of shellfish. Children who are allergic to shellfish may be able to tolerate fish that swim, such as flounder or cod, but testing may be needed to determine any sensitivity to those foods. Alternatively, children who are allergic to fish that swim may tolerate shellfish. Marinara sauce, Worcestershire sauce, salad dressings, and hot dogs and deli meats may also contain fish or shellfish ingredients.

Irish Research, revealed at a conference in February, showed that some staff in food businesses including sandwich bars, cafés, supermarkets and forecourt shops were unable to give allergy sufferers accurate advice about the food they were ordering.



When asked by the Environmental Health Officers who carried out the research, serving staff failed to give accurate advice with one in ten showing no understanding, or awareness of peanut allergy, and only a third showing confidence in the advice they gave. Across the island of Ireland, 55% of samples which tested positive for peanut protein came with the wrong advice.

A new training program will enable Environmental Health Officers to better advise and support their local food businesses while also providing them with the tools to cascade the training to those businesses. It is hoped that if the pilot is successful, that this innovative training could be made available to Environmental Health Officers across the island.