

Food Allergy Basics for All Ages

This handout provides general information and tips for managing food allergies. Speak with your child's allergist if you have questions or before making changes to your child's food allergy management plan.

There is a lot of new information to learn when your child is diagnosed with a food allergy. It is normal for parents to feel overwhelmed at times. This handout was designed to be a resource you can refer back to over time. You can also read the Food Allergy Stages handout for *your child's age* for specific tips for managing food allergies at their stage of development. As you learn more about food allergy management, you will feel more confident and develop routines that work for your family!



Definitions

Allergen: An allergen is something (usually a protein) that causes an allergic reaction, such as something in food or the environment. For someone with a food allergy to peanut, peanut is an allergen.

Allergic reaction: Symptoms of an allergic reaction usually happen between a few minutes and two hours after exposure to a food. The most common symptoms involve the skin (e.g., hives, redness, or itching), respiratory symptoms (e.g., trouble breathing, hoarse voice, or wheezing), and gastrointestinal or gut symptoms (e.g., vomiting or diarrhea). Symptoms can occur by themselves or in combination, such as skin rash and trouble breathing. Reactions can range from mild to severe and symptoms can be different each time.

Anaphylaxis: Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that can be life threatening, with symptoms such as difficulty breathing or feeling dizzy and passing out. Any time two body systems are involved, for example the skin (hives) and gut (vomiting), that is also anaphylaxis.

Epinephrine: Epinephrine is a safe medicine that works quickly to stop an allergic reaction, including anaphylaxis.

Epinephrine auto-injector: An auto-injector is the device used to treat anaphylaxis by giving a dose of epinephrine into the thigh muscle. Generics and several brands are available, such as EpiPen®, Auvi-Q®, and Adrenaclick®. Symjepi™ also gives a dose of epinephrine, but uses a pre-filled syringe instead of an auto-injector.

Anaphylaxis Action Plan: The Anaphylaxis Action Plan (sometimes called the Emergency Care Plan or Food Allergy Action Plan) is a document developed with your child's allergist. The plan lists your child's food allergies and gives important information about symptoms of an allergic reaction, how to treat a reaction, and how to get emergency help.

Cross-contact: Cross-contact can happen when a food allergen accidentally touches safe food. For example, slicing an apple on a cutting board after slicing cheese (without cleaning it first) could pose a risk of cross-contact for someone with an allergy to milk.

Managing Food Allergies at Home

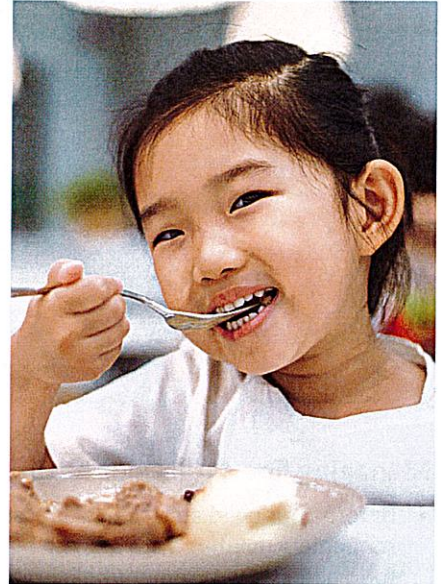
- Your family will decide whether to keep your child's allergens in your home. This may depend on your child's age, how common the allergen is in food items, and dietary needs of other family members.
- Set family rules, such as:
 - No sharing food, drinks, dishware, cups, or utensils.
 - Hand-washing before and after eating.
 - Eating is only allowed in specific areas of the home (e.g., kitchen, dining table).
- Keep a copy of the Anaphylaxis Action Plan clearly posted (e.g., on the refrigerator).
- Make sure everyone knows where epinephrine auto-injectors are stored in the house.

TO AVOID CROSS-CONTACT AT HOME:

- Wash your hands before preparing and feeding food to your child.
- Use separate serving utensils for foods with and without allergens.
- Clean counters and table tops with soap and water or commercial cleaners.
- Use clean cutting boards, pots/pans, and utensils to prepare your child's food.
- Clean cooking surfaces such as microwaves, toaster ovens, and grills, or use foil or a grill pan for ovens/grills.
- Store food containing allergens away from safe food to avoid spills and confusion.

Eating Out at Restaurants

- Eating out can be a positive experience with advanced planning. Visit the restaurant's website to see the menu and allergy policy or call ahead and speak with the manager.
- Visit new restaurants at off-peak hours to allow enough time for questions.
- Bring safe food with you when possible to ensure a safe option.
- Bring wipes to clean surfaces if needed (e.g., table, chairs/high chairs/boosters).
- Always have your child's epinephrine auto-injector. Do not eat without it.
- Tell restaurant staff that your child has a food allergy. Speak with someone in charge like the manager or chef, in addition to the server. Be clear this is not just being picky.
- Ask how food is prepared. Inform staff about cross-contact risks and hidden ingredients. Give examples for your child's allergens (e.g., cooking fries in the same oil as fish is a cross-contact risk for someone with an allergy to fish).
- Consider carrying a "chef card" that lists your child's allergens.
- It is okay to ask for a new dish if there is a mistake or to leave if you don't think the restaurant can prepare food that is safe for your child.



Educating Other Caregivers

- Food allergies may be new to many people. Plan to teach other caregivers in advance to make the experience safe and positive for everyone. Make sure to leave time for questions.
- Make sure that all people caring for your child understand how to read an ingredient label and safely prepare/serve food to avoid cross-contact. Consider preparing your child's food ahead of time.
- Review your child's Anaphylaxis Action Plan with the caregiver. Make sure they can recognize an allergic reaction and have them practice with an epinephrine auto-injector trainer.
- Make sure caregivers have your contact information and can call 911 in an emergency.
- Be clear that everyone caring for your child needs to follow their food allergy management plan. "Food allergies are serious, because eating even a little bit of the food can make my child very sick. The good news is that the plan our allergist gave us works very well. When we all follow the same plan, it helps keep her safe and makes her feel confident."

Food Allergy Stages:

Food Allergy Basics for All Ages

The following Food Allergy Stages handouts provide specific recommendations and tips for managing food allergies at different ages:

Baby (0-12 months)
Toddler (1-3 years)
Preschool (3-5 years)
Early Grade School (5-8 years)

Late Grade School (8-11 years)
Early Teen (11-14 years)
Late Teen (14-18 years)
Young Adult (18-21 years)

Resources for Further Information

Please note that website links may change. (Links last accessed 7/8/2022)

PROFESSIONAL AND PATIENT SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

- American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) www.aaaai.org
- American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (ACAAI) www.acaai.org
- Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) www.aafa.org
- Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE) www.foodallergy.org
- Kids with Food Allergies (KFA) www.kidswithfoodallergies.org
- American Partnership for Eosinophilic Disorders (APFED) www.apfed.org
- The FPIES Foundation www.fpiesfoundation.org
- International FPIES Association (I-FPIES) www.fpies.org

LABEL READING

- Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 Questions and Answers www.fda.gov/food/food-allergens/gluten-free-guidance-documents-regulatory-information/food-allergen-labeling-and-consumer-protection-act-2004-questions-and-answers

RECOGNIZING AND TREATING ALLERGIC REACTIONS

- Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Food Allergy in the United States: Summary for Patients, Families, and Caregivers www.niaid.nih.gov/sites/default/files/faguidelinespatient.pdf
- AAAAI Anaphylaxis Emergency Action Plan <https://www.aaaai.org/Aaaai/media/Media-Library-PDFs/Tools%20for%20the%20Public/Allergy,%20Asthma,%20Immunology%20Glossary/Anaphylaxis-Emergency-Action-Plan.pdf>
- AAAAI Anaphylaxis Overview, Symptoms, Treatment and Management, articles and quiz <https://www.aaaai.org/Conditions-Treatments/Allergies/Anaphylaxis>
- AAAAI Food Allergy Overview, Symptoms, Treatment and Management, articles and quiz <https://www.aaaai.org/Conditions-Treatments/Allergies/Food-Allergy>

MANAGING FOOD ALLERGIES IN CHILD CARE AND SCHOOL

- CDC Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies in Schools and Early Care and Education Program www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/pdf/20_316712-A_FA_guide_508tag.pdf
- AAAAI School Tools <https://www.aaaai.org/Tools-for-the-Public/School-Tools>

OTHER EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

- Jaffe Food Allergy Institute video on Diagnosing and Avoiding Food Allergens www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAW60o8k_b8
- Jaffe Food Allergy Institute video on Recognizing and Treating Anaphylaxis www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCKSUzZHMq8
- Allergy Ready www.allergyready.com
- Living Confidently with Food Allergy: A Guide for Parents and Families www.allergyhome.org/handbook/

FOOD ASSISTANCE AND OTHER REDUCED COST PROGRAMS

- www.findhelp.org
- www.211.org
- www.foodequalityinitiative.org