

Understanding Food Allergies

What is a food allergy?

The body mistaking a food as harmful.

Common Food Allergens

Foods that most commonly cause food allergy are:

- milk and milk products
- egg
- peanut
- tree nuts – like almonds, cashews and walnuts
- soy
- seafood – like fish, shellfish and crustaceans such as crab and lobster
- wheat
- sesame
- mustard
- sulphites



DID YOU KNOW?

Food allergy and other allergic conditions – such as eczema, asthma and hay fever – tend to run in families. Talk about your family history with your health care provider to find out if your child is at risk.



TRY THIS

See Reducing Risk of Food Allergy in Your Baby at healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating-physical-activity/age-and-stage/infants-children-and-youth/reducing-risk-food to learn more.

Introducing Common Food Allergens

To reduce the risk of a food allergy developing, introduce the common food allergens when your baby has shown that they're ready for solid foods – usually around 6 months. (See [Introducing Solid Foods](#).)

When introducing a common food allergen for the first time, do not place the food directly on your baby's skin. Foods sometimes irritate the skin and may be misinterpreted as an allergic reaction. For this reason, consider spoon-feeding allergenic foods the first couple of times you offer them to your baby.

Start by offering common allergens one at a time. Begin with the common allergens your family eats most often. Try, for example:

- peanut and tree-nut butters blended into infant cereal or spread thinly on strips of toast
- well-cooked egg and seafood
- milk products like yogurt and grated cheese. Wait until 9 to 12 months to offer whole (3.25%) milk.

If no symptoms occur, offer more. Then keep offering the food regularly – a few times a week, for example – to help maintain your baby's tolerance to it.

Signs of Food Allergy

Feeding common allergens for the first time is safe and rarely causes a serious reaction.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction usually appear within a few minutes of being exposed to a food but it can happen up to 2 hours later. The most common signs include:

- hives, swelling, redness or rash
- stuffy or runny nose with itchy, watery eyes
- vomiting
- coughing

If you think a food may have caused an allergic reaction, stop offering it and speak to your health care provider. You can continue to introduce other new foods, including other common food allergens.

Severe symptoms require immediate attention. These include:

- swelling of the mouth, tongue or throat
- hives that are spreading
- trouble breathing, repetitive coughing or wheezing
- difficulty swallowing or a hoarse voice or cry
- pale or bluish face or lips
- faintness, weakness or passing out



MEDICAL EMERGENCY

Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number right away if your child is showing signs of a severe allergic reaction.