

Food Allergies and Intolerances

A food intolerance is not the same as a food allergy.

People with a food intolerance may have digestive symptoms such as diarrhoea, bloating and stomach cramps. This may be caused by difficulties digesting certain substances, such as lactose. However, no allergic reaction takes place.

Important differences between a food allergy and a food intolerance include:

- The symptoms of a food intolerance usually only occur several hours after eating the food.
- You need to eat a larger amount of food to trigger an intolerance than an allergy.
- Unlike an allergy, a food intolerance is never life-threatening.

A food allergy is when the body's immune system reacts abnormally to specific foods.

Allergic reactions are often mild, but they can sometimes be very serious.

In children, common food allergies include being allergic to milk and eggs. In adults, allergies to fruits and vegetables are more common. Nut allergies, such as being allergic to peanut, are relatively common in both children and adults.

Symptoms of a food allergy can affect different areas of the body at the same time. Some common symptoms include:

- an itchy sensation inside the mouth, throat or ears
- raised itchy red skin rash (this is known as [urticaria](#), hives or "nettle rash")
- swelling of the face, around the eyes, lips, tongue and the roof of the mouth

In the most serious cases, a person has a severe allergic reaction ([anaphylaxis](#)), which can be life-threatening.

If you suspect that somebody is experiencing the [symptoms of anaphylaxis](#), such as breathing difficulties and swollen lips, immediately call 999 for an ambulance and tell the operator that you think the person has anaphylaxis.

Signs of anaphylaxis include:

- breathing difficulties
- feeling lightheaded or faint
- changes to your skin, such as itchy skin or a raised, red skin rash
- swelling of certain body parts, particularly the face

If you are cooking with any child with a food allergy it is very important that you read the list of ingredients on the label of any pre-packed food or drinks you use.

Under EU law, any pre-packed food or drink sold in the UK must clearly state on the label if it contains the following ingredients:

- celery
- cereals that contain gluten (including wheat, rye, barley and oats)
- crustaceans (including prawns, crabs and lobsters)
- eggs
- fish
- lupin (lupins are common garden plants and the seeds from some varieties are sometimes used to make flour)
- milk
- molluscs (including mussels and oysters)
- mustard
- tree nuts, such as almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, pistachios and macadamia nuts
- peanuts
- sesame seeds
- soybeans
- sulphur dioxide and sulphites (preservatives that are used in some foods and drinks) at levels above 10mg per kg or per litre #

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It is important to understand that different manufacturers can choose to use different phrases to warn of allergen cross contamination risks - such as

- May contain x
- Made on equipment that also processes x
- Made in a factory that also handles x

These different phrases describe how the risk arises, but are not indicative of the severity of the risk. For this reason, none of these warnings should be read as being more or less serious than another phrase.

Currently, unpackaged food doesn't need to be labelled in the same way as packaged food, and therefore it can be more difficult for to know what ingredients are used in a particular dish.

Examples of unpackaged food include food sold from:

- bakeries (including in-store bakeries in supermarkets)
- delis
- salad bars
- "ready-to-eat" sandwich shops

Therefore extra care must be taken when purchasing foods from these outlets.