

Peanut Allergy in A Nutshell

Peanut allergies are one of the most common food allergies, especially in children. In recent years, allergists have noted an increase in the number of people with allergies to peanuts. This allergy can be so severe that even trace amounts of a peanut can be fatal. A child who is severely allergic to peanuts should have epinephrine or adrenaline (an injectable drug which can be life saving for allergic reactions) immediately available to treat the allergic reaction (eg., Epi pen).



What is Allergic (Anaphylactic) Shock Reaction?

Anaphylactic (a-na-fi=lak-tik) shock is the most severe and life-threatening type of allergic reaction. It can happen within minutes of exposure to peanuts. Anaphylactic shock can lead to coma and death.

Other possible symptoms of an allergic reaction to peanuts may include:

- nausea, cramps, vomiting, diarrhea
- Hives, itching, redness or swelling of the eyelids, lips or anywhere on the skin.
- Breathing problems including coughing, wheezing, tightness in the throat or chest, a runny or stuffy nose, itchy watery eyes
- Trouble swallowing
- Dizziness, feeling like dying.

Is there a “Cure” for a Peanut Allergy?

No. The only “treatment” is avoidance of all products containing peanuts. Sensitive individuals must realize that they must be very careful about their food intake, and know that they can die from a reaction.

Can’t the Allergic Person Just Avoid Peanuts?

This sounds simple but it takes some careful planning. Peanuts tend to leave residue on utensils, containers and tabletops. It only takes a tiny amount of peanut particles or residue to cause some people to react. Therefore, it is critical that everyone helps to avoid a life-threatening reaction.

Will My Child Outgrow This Allergy?

It’s unlikely. Young children who develop allergies to milk, eggs, wheat or soy often outgrow these allergies. It is rare that allergies to peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish are outgrown.



Are Peanuts the Same as Nuts?

No. Peanuts are “ground” nuts and thus are not really nuts, but a member of the legume family. Although it would be unusual for someone to be allergic to other legumes, it is possible. All other nuts are “tree” nuts, e.g. walnuts, cashews, almonds, etc. Allergies to tree nuts are usually severe as well.

It is possible, for someone to be allergic to both nuts and peanuts. On the other hand, most people who are allergic to one tree nut are also allergic to other tree nuts.

Tips For Preventing Peanut Allergy Reaction in Group Settings and Away From Home

- Be sure to know who in the group is allergic to peanuts.
- Request that foods brought from home do not contain peanut products or ingredients.
- Set a policy that no foods prepared in the setting contain peanut products.
- Ask parents of peanut-allergic children to share their ideas and any brand names of specific products to use or to avoid.
- Inform friends, relatives and acquaintances.
- Caregivers of the allergic child must be vigilant about a possible fatal mistake. Most exposures are accidental.
- Have prescribed medication and an action plan available in case of a reaction. Know how to use an Epi pen if prescribed.
- Use the enclosed lists:
Tips For Allergy-Safe Food Preparation
Tips When Grocery Shopping
Peanut-free snack ideas
Peanut-free lunch ideas



Tips For Avoiding Peanuts

For Allergy-Safe Food Preparation:

- Always wash hands before preparing and handling food.
- Thoroughly clean and sanitize work and cooking surfaces, utensils and any equipment that touches food.
- Cross-contamination is a common cause of anaphylactic reactions. Wiping a

utensil after use is not an adequate method of cleaning. The utensil may appear clean but the remaining food residue on a utensil can be all it takes to trigger a reaction. "Safe" foods become "unsafe" through contact with peanuts or peanut products. For example, be sure that the jam container is not contaminated by the peanut butter knife and watch for peanut crumbs from cookies in a cookie jar.

- If possible, store peanut-containing foods separately in both the fridge and cupboard.
- Be sure to label all food products with common names and ingredients whenever possible.
- For any home-prepared foods, check the ingredient list for each product being used.
- If in doubt, DO NOT use a suspected food or product. Guessing can be deadly!

Tips When Grocery Shopping:

- Never assume that a food is free of allergic ingredients.
- When buying pre-packaged, prepared foods, read the labels carefully every time you shop. Ingredients often change without warning - a product that was safe last week may not be safe this week.



Ingredients containing/made from peanuts

Peanuts	Peanut meal
Peanut Butter	Peanut flour
Mixed nuts	Ground nut
Peanut sauce	Mandelona nuts
Peanut oil	Beer nuts
Arachis oil	

Ingredients that may contain peanuts

Vegetable/plant protein
Vegetable/almond paste

- Regulations in Canada require manufacturers to list peanut oil if it is part of the vegetable oil or product.



Peanut oil may or may not be safe, depending on the process used to make the oil. To be cautious, avoid peanut oil.

- Avoid any products that do not carry a complete list of ingredients. For example, bulk foods and goods from on-site bakeries do not have ingredient lists because these foods are not prepackaged.
- Avoid imported foods with foreign language ingredient lists. For example, imported chocolate bars may not list peanuts, even when they are present.
- Beware of nu-nut products. Nu-nut products are being sold that contain peanuts that are deflavored, reflavored, pressed and sold as almonds, walnuts and other nuts.
- You might find the disclaimer “may contain trace amounts of peanuts or nuts” on some processed foods. This means that the manufacturer is not 100% sure that the product is free of peanut ingredients. There is some risk if eaten by someone with a peanut allergy.
- Have a pad and pen with you when you shop. If you have a question about a product, write down the product name and the manufacturer's phone number or address. Contact the manufacturer when you get home and ask whether the product contains peanut protein.

Tips When Dining Out:

- Always ask about the ingredients and the way the food is prepared before you order. Even if the restaurant is part of a chain, there can be differences between locations. If the ingredients cannot be confirmed order something else.



- Restaurants bearing an Allergy Aware sticker have a senior staff member on each shift who can answer questions about ingredients. Remember, if the staff member is uncertain of the ingredients, order something else. For a listing of Allergy Aware restaurants, please contact the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservice Association, (416) 923-8416.
- Order simply prepared foods. Foods like baked potatoes, steamed vegetables and broiled meat are less likely to create problems. Avoid added sauces and flavourings, unless all ingredients and exposure to allergens can be confirmed.
- Avoid buffets. Often, people will use the same spoon in different dishes.
- Be especially cautious of the ingredients of the following foods:
 - ✓ Asian, Thai and African foods as well as muffins and desserts often contain peanuts.
 - ✓ Peanut butter is sometimes used as a thickener, or even to hide a burnt taste in spaghetti sauce, chili or gravy. Peanuts may be used in piecrusts or to seal egg rolls.
 - ✓ If a previous customer had nuts on their ice cream, some could get stuck in the machine and end up in your ice cream. Or, the same scoop that was used in a peanut-containing ice cream could be used in your ice cream.

How Do I Handle a Peanut Allergy Reaction?

People with food allergies may have different reactions after eating certain foods. These reactions may vary in intensity, type of response, and duration.

For this reason it is important to respond to any reaction quickly. Before you are left to care for a child in either a home or group setting be sure to ask if the child has any allergies and to have clear instructions on how to handle an emergency situation such as anaphylactic shock.

Sources of Additional Information

This information does not replace any advice given by a physician and does not provide all of the necessary information to manage allergies. Parents and caregivers need to develop a plan for preventing and treating allergic reactions.

The Allergy/Asthma Information Association (AAIA)

P.O. Box 100
Toronto, ON M9W 5K9
Tel: (416) 679-9521
Fax: (416) 679-9524



The AAIA is a membership-based national organization of patients helping patients. Activities include increasing public awareness of allergy/asthma/anaphylaxis and helping individuals and their caregivers gain control of their condition and thus improve their quality of life. The AAIA provides a parent's package with a wide variety of allergy-related information letters, as well as a quarterly newsletter, cookbooks and seminars. It has a list of support groups located throughout the province. Membership cost is \$35 for one year and \$60 for 2 years.

The Allergy/Asthma and Immunology Society of Ontario

2 Demaris Avenue
Toronto, ON M3N 1M1
Tel: (416) 633-2215
Fax: (416) 633-3108



This society is made up of doctors specializing in allergy. They respond to inquiries on the information "hotline" and provide information on food products, the availability of specialty foods and up-to-date information about the availability of specialists in the allergy field.

Anaphylaxis Canada

416 Moore Avenue, Suite 306
Toronto, ON M4G 1C9
Tel: (416) 785-5666
Fax: (416) 785-0458
Website: www.anaphylaxis.org



This organization consists of people who are affected by life-threatening allergies. It's goal is to help members live safely with anaphylaxis by: providing information and support, raising public awareness and understanding and advocating for changes in society that will provide better protection and safer environments for people with anaphylaxis.

Many schools are beginning to develop policies and procedures for supporting peanut allergic children. Health Canada and the Canadian School Board Association have developed a handbook for school boards on managing severe allergies; Anaphylaxis: A Handbook for School Boards. To order a copy, contact the Canadian School Board Association: Tel: (613) 235-3724 or Fax: (613) 238-8434 www.cdnsba.org

