

# Allergy Advice

## For adults and young people following a new allergy diagnosis

### You have been given this information sheet because you have had an allergic reaction to something.

An allergy occurs when your immune system, which normally fights infection, overreacts to a substance called an allergen. Most allergens are normally harmless and do not affect people who are not allergic to them. Allergic reactions can vary from mild to life-threatening. Sometimes it is difficult to know what is causing allergic reactions and for some people allergic reactions can occur with no obvious cause.

### What can I do to keep myself safe?

If you think you have reacted to a food, avoiding **that allergen** is a sensible precaution until you can be seen for an allergy assessment. Having a fast acting antihistamine (cetirizine) available at all times for emergency use is helpful.

With environmental allergens such as pollen or animals it can help to take a non-drowsy antihistamine (cetirizine or loratadine) prior to coming into contact with that allergen if you are able. With environmental allergens it can be hard to reduce exposure but websites such as Allergy UK or the National Eczema Society have more information.

If you have asthma it is important to keep this well controlled as otherwise it can increase your chances of a severe reaction. Always have your inhalers with you. Contact your GP or asthma nurse for advice.

### Avoiding suspected food allergens

In order to check which foods contain your suspect allergen you will need to **read the ingredients list** of any packets of foods or ask in cafes and restaurants to check if the food is likely to contain the allergen you are concerned about.

### Common allergens that require labelling by law

All pre-packaged food made with common food allergens must be clearly labelled with the name of the allergen in the ingredients list. This **ONLY** applies for the common allergens listed below:

|         |           |                                |           |
|---------|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Milk    | Sesame    | Soya                           | Mustard   |
| Egg     | Shellfish | Celery                         | Sulphites |
| Peanut* | Fish      | gluten (wheat, rye,<br>barley) | Lupin     |
| Nuts**  | Molluscs  |                                |           |

\*Peanuts must be called peanuts – other names for peanut should not be used.

\*\* Foods containing tree nut: almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, cashews, pecans, brazil nuts, pistachios & macadamia nuts must be listed on the ingredient list.

If you have an allergy to a food which is not on this list, **it will not be highlighted** but should be included on the product's ingredients list. **Please be aware if you are buying foods outside Europe these rules will not apply.**

### 'May contain' or warning labels

Processed foods especially in snack foods, chocolates and sweets often have labelling suggesting possible cross-contamination with your allergic food. Examples are '**may contain**' or '**made in a factory**'. Be aware of these warning labels. These are not deliberate ingredients. For maximum safety you would need to avoid all food with these labels. As avoiding all 'may contain' labels is very difficult some people choose to eat 'may contain' products but following these three rules to keep as safe as possible. Any label that states, '**contains allergen**' (e.g. contains milk) should continue to be **strictly avoided**.

1. You should only eat these foods when you have your medicines with you and when you can get medical help easily.
2. Having eaten a food previously does not guarantee its safety – recipes and production lines can change. A warning label on a food should be treated as a potential risk **every time**.
3. Allergic reactions are more likely to occur if you are; unwell, exercising or if you are upset. If your asthma or hay fever is playing up this can also increase the risk of a more severe reaction.

### Foods without packaging

Information **must** be provided on allergens in foods sold without packaging or wrapped on site. This includes foods sold at supermarkets, delis, cafes and restaurants. This information may be in a folder, written on a poster, or provided verbally by a member of staff. If a food or meal does not have a full ingredients list you must always check the allergen information before eating. If unsure, always ask a member of staff, **if still unsure – do not eat the food**.

These regulations do not rule out accidental contamination. Sometimes small amounts of the allergen you need to avoid may have come into contact with another food. It is particularly important to be careful in self-service restaurants and buffets.

## Eating out

You may want to contact a restaurant in advance about your food allergy, as well as speaking to the chef about your allergy before choosing your dishes. Many restaurants have allergen information on their websites. You could carry a 'chef card' with a list of your allergies to give to the restaurant staff (examples are on the food standards agency website). **Don't risk eating a food unless you are sure it's suitable.**

## What should I look out for if I have a reaction to something?

Symptoms can vary considerably in allergy, and each reaction can be different.

### Mild Symptoms

Itchy 'nettle type' rash  
(Hives)  
Tingly itchy feeling in the  
mouth  
Feeling sick or nauseous.

### More Serious Symptoms

Swelling around the face/mouth or  
throat  
Difficulty swallowing or speaking  
Sudden severe breathing difficulties or  
asthma  
Abdominal pain, sudden vomiting  
Feeling faint or losing consciousness.

## What to do in an allergic reaction

If you have a reaction to something, try and keep as calm as you can.  
If symptoms are mild, take some antihistamine.

You should then seek medical advice from your GP, NHS 111, Out of Hours service or Minor injuries Unit if symptoms do not improve or worsen.

**If at any point you are worried that symptoms seem to be getting severe, you should seek urgent medical advice by calling 999 or NHS 111.**

**Stay where you are and call for help rather than moving or standing up.**

If you have been prescribed an Adrenaline Auto-Injector (EpiPen, Jext or Emerade) and you have difficulty breathing or feel faint (deteriorating consciousness) **use it immediately and call 999.**



**Further allergy support can be found on the following websites:**

**RUH Allergy Team advice;** [ruh-tr.paediatricallergy@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.paediatricallergy@nhs.net) – **Under 18's only**

**UK Allergy Charity;** <https://www.allergyuk.org/>

**UK Anaphylaxis Charity;** <https://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/>

**Food Standards Agency;** <https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/food-allergy-and-intolerance#eating-out-with-confidence>

**National Eczema Society information and patient resources;**  
[www.eczema.org/](http://www.eczema.org/)

**Asthma information and patient resources;** <https://www.asthma.org.uk/>

**For Adrenaline Auto-Injectors information – Google the name of the device you have been given i.e: EpiPen, Jext or Emerade**

Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust  
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG  
01225 428331 [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

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