

Allergy Advice

For families with young children

You have been given this information sheet because your child has 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 my child safe?

If you think your child has reacted to a food, avoiding **that allergen** is a sensible precaution until they can be seen in allergy clinic. Having an antihistamine (cetirizine or chlorphenamine) 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 or your child has asthma it is important to keep this well controlled as otherwise it can increase your chances of a severe reaction. Always have any inhalers with you. Contact your GP or asthma nurse for advice.

Avoiding suspected food allergens

In order to check which foods contain the suspect allergen you will need to **read the ingredients list** of any packets of food 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, 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 your child has 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, chocolate and sweets often have labelling suggesting possible cross-contamination with the allergic food. Examples are '**may contain**' or '**made in a factory**'. 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 allow your child to 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 your child is unwell with another illness, exercising or upset. If your child's 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 are avoiding 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. Don't risk eating a food unless you are sure it's suitable.**

What should I look out for in 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 if your child has an allergic reaction

If your child have a reaction to something, try and keep as calm as you can.

If symptoms are mild give 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.

Discourage your child from standing up running around until they are better. If you have been prescribed an Adrenaline Auto-Injector (EpiPen, Jext or Emerade) and your child has difficulty breathing, is feeling faint or has 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

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/

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

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net or telephone 01225 825656 or 826319