

Food Allergy Facts and Figures

What Is a Food Allergy?

- A [food allergy](#) occurs when the body's immune system sees a certain food as harmful and reacts by causing symptoms. This is an allergic reaction.
- Foods that cause allergic reactions are called [allergens](#).
- Allergic reactions can involve the skin, mouth, eyes, lungs, heart, gut, and brain.
- Mild and severe symptoms can lead to a serious allergic reaction called [anaphylaxis](#) [anna-fih-LACK-sis]. This reaction usually involves more than one part of the body and can worsen quickly.
- Anaphylaxis must be treated right away with epinephrine to provide the best chance for improvement and prevent serious, potentially life-threatening complications.

How Common Are Food Allergies?

- As of 2021, about 20 million people have food allergies in the U.S.^{1,2}
 - About 16 million (6.2%) U.S. adults have food allergies.¹
 - About 4 million (5.8%) U.S. children have food allergies.²
- In 2021, 7.6% of non-Hispanic Black children had food allergies, compared to 5.5% of non-Hispanic white children.²
 - Food allergy has increased among U.S. children over the past 20 years, with the greatest increase in Black children.³
- Children with food allergies are two to four times more likely to have asthma or other allergic diseases.⁴

What Are the Most Frequent Food Allergens?

- Nine foods cause most food allergy reactions in the United States:⁵
 - Milk
 - Egg
 - Peanut
 - Tree nut (for example, almonds, walnut, pecans, cashews, pistachios)
 - Wheat
 - Sesame
 - Soy
 - Fish (for example, bass, flounder, cod)
 - Shellfish (for example, crab, shrimp, scallop, clams)
- Sesame is a rising food allergy. It impacts an estimated 1 million people in the United States.⁶ It was declared a major allergen in the United States in 2021.



What Is Anaphylaxis?

- Anaphylaxis is a severe, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction. Not all allergic reactions are anaphylaxis.⁷
- Symptoms of anaphylaxis usually involve more than one part of the body such as the skin, mouth, eyes, lungs, heart, gut, and brain.
- Symptoms of anaphylaxis can include:
 - Skin: hives (often very itchy), flushed skin, or rash
 - Mouth: swelling of the lips, tongue, and throat; tingling or itchy feeling in the mouth
 - Lungs: shortness of breath, trouble breathing, coughing, or wheezing
 - Heart: dizziness, lightheadedness, loss of consciousness, low blood pressure, shock
 - Stomach: cramps, vomiting, diarrhea⁵
- Each year in the U.S., it is estimated that anaphylaxis to food results in 90,000 emergency room visits.⁷
 - From 2006–2015, emergency room visits from food-induced anaphylaxis in infants and toddlers more than doubled⁸

How Are Food Allergies Managed and Treated?

- Although new treatments are being developed, there is currently no cure for food allergies.⁵
- Not eating the food allergen is the primary way to prevent a reaction.⁵
- People with food allergies should carefully read food ingredient labels and always ask about ingredients before eating food prepared by other people.⁵
- Epinephrine is the first line of treatment for anaphylaxis.⁹
- People with food allergies should always have epinephrine with them.⁹
- If a person is having anaphylaxis, they should:
 - Follow their [Anaphylaxis Action Plan](#)
 - Use their epinephrine
 - Get emergency medical care to ensure symptoms resolve¹⁰

Are Food Allergies Outgrown?

- Milk, egg, wheat, and soy allergies are often outgrown. Most people do not outgrow peanut, tree nut, fish, and shellfish allergies.¹¹

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