

# 8023 - Food Allergy and Food Intolerances



A variety of foreign compounds enter the body when food is eaten. Some, such as germs, can be harmful while others, such as nutrients, are helpful. The job of the immune system is to decide which of these compounds are harmful and then to protect the body against them.

**Food Allergy:** This results when the immune system decides that a protein in a particular food is harmful, and begins an attack when that food enters the body. According to Health Canada, food allergies affect as many as 6% of young children and 3% to 4% of adults.



**Food Intolerance:** This does not involve the body's immune system. Unlike food allergies, where a small amount of food can cause a reaction, it generally takes a more normal sized portion to produce symptoms of food intolerance. While the symptoms of food intolerance vary and can be mistaken for those of a food allergy, food intolerances are more likely to originate in the gastrointestinal system and are usually caused by an inability to digest or absorb certain foods, or components of those foods.

For example, intolerance to dairy products is one of the most common. Known as lactose intolerance, it occurs in people who lack an enzyme called lactase, which is needed to digest lactose (a sugar in milk). Symptoms of lactose intolerance may include abdominal pain and bloating, diarrhea and flatulence.

**The most common food allergies are** peanuts, tree nuts (such as almonds and walnuts), sesame seeds, milk, eggs, seafood (fish, crustaceans and shellfish), soy, wheat and sulphites (a food additive).

## Spot the Symptoms of a Food Allergy!

- **Skin problems:** (example: hives; tissue swelling – especially of the face and around the mouth; itching and reddening of the skin; and eczema in young children)
- **Breathing problems:** (example: stuffy, runny nose and itchy eyes; worsening of asthma in asthmatics)
- **Digestion problems:** (example: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea)
- **Anaphylaxis:** the most severe allergic response may involve all of the above symptoms and can be life threatening.



## Tips to help you manage food allergies and intolerances for your family:

- Get a diagnosis. If you think your child is having a bad reaction to a food, see a doctor.
- If food allergy or intolerance is suspected, it's important that the offending food is *accurately* identified so you can avoid **ONLY** the food that causes the symptom.
- If you must remove a food from normal eating, explore other available foods that have the same nutrients as those that are avoided. For example, if you are allergic to milk, you must find other ways to replace the nutrients in milk such as calcium and Vitamin D.
- Get the facts from a trusted source. A registered Dietitian can help you manage food allergy and food intolerance.
- Read the ingredient list for items that are in the food. Learn the alternative names for the food item you are trying to avoid. For example, "casein" is a name for milk proteins.
- Home-prepared foods may be easier than packaged foods because you know and can control what goes into the food.
- Food allergies and intolerances can change over the life cycle. Regular physical check-ups are important to be sure that you or your child are eating all the foods you can and not eliminating any foods you don't have to.
- Living with food allergies and food intolerances can be challenging. Knowledgeable health care professionals and advocacy groups can provide support and guidance. Changing the food you eat may seem difficult at first, but with patience, these changes will become second nature.

