

Food Allergy Essentials

Life with food allergies can be tricky at times. Learn the basics about managing food allergies (your own or the allergies of others) with this handy-dandy guide.

Eight Allergens

According to the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN), eight different foods are responsible for 90% of all allergic reactions that are related to food. These allergens are...

- Peanuts
- Tree Nuts
- Milk
- Eggs
- Wheat
- Soy
- Fish
- Shellfish

Read the Labels

- It is vital to read food labels and contact manufacturers for clarification if you have any concerns.
- Factories can vary, so just because a food from one company does not contain a particular allergen does not guarantee that other versions from other manufacturers are automatically safe.
- Product ingredients are always changing. Check the label, every time, even if the person with the allergy has safely eaten that exact food before.
- Food labels aren't the only ones you should read. Be sure to check labels on products like lotion, soap, and cosmetics, which can contain wheat, milk, tree nuts, or eggs.

Don't Contaminate!

Every tool and surface should be thoroughly cleaned with hot, soapy water before being used to prepare allergen-free foods. Failure to do so could result in cross-contamination.

- If you are preparing an allergen-free meal alongside other meals, make the one without allergens first. Then cover it and store it well away from the rest of the foods. This will help you avoid spatters or other forms of contamination.
- According to FAAN, "Even a trace of food on a spoon or spatula that is invisible to us can cause an allergic reaction."
- Before you serve an allergen-free meal, wash your hands and arms thoroughly.

Vital Tools

- The only way to prevent a reaction is to steer clear of the food and the reactions it causes.
- There is no medicine currently capable of preventing food allergies.
- However, there are medicines available to help control the symptoms of a reaction.
 - If a doctor prescribes medicine like an EpiPen, have the person with the allergy always carry it with the.
 - The TSA permits passengers to bring epinephrine onboard an airplane, provided that it includes its original printed label.
 - It is also wise to carry a letter from a doctor that confirms an allergy.
- If you have an allergy, consider wearing a medical alert ID.

For More Information:

- <http://www.foodallergy.org/>
- Chef cards are great for alerting restaurant staff of allergies. Download a template at <http://www.foodallergy.org/page/chef-card1>.
- Check out the "Welcoming Guests with Food Allergies" program. It's available at <http://www.foodallergy.org/files/WelcomingGuests2010.pdf>.