



DietaryHawk

FOOD ALLERGY

WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGY?

A food allergy is an immune system response to a specific protein in a specific food. To most people these proteins are harmless but for individuals with an allergy, the immune system mistakenly identifies the protein as harmful and tries to remove it from the body.

Any substance that causes an allergic reaction is called an “allergen”. When someone with an allergy comes in contact, inhales or consumes an allergen, the immune system produces large amounts of allergic antibodies. This causes the release of a substance called histamine which can trigger symptoms and affect a person’s gastrointestinal tract, respiratory system, cardiovascular system or skin.

HOW COMMON ARE FOOD ALLERGIES?

Food allergies are on the rise and it is estimated that 10% of infants, 4-8% of children and 2% of adults are affected by food allergy. Food allergies can appear at any age, but about 60% of food allergies appear during the first year of life. Fatalities from food-induced allergic reaction increase by around 10% each year.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF FOOD ALLERGY?

Symptoms of food allergy can vary between individuals but common symptoms include:

Mild to moderate

Swelling of lips, face, eyes
Red, watery and itchy eyes
Tingling in the mouth
Skin rash
Hives
Nausea

Severe (anaphylaxis)

Swelling or tightness in the throat
Swelling of the tongue
Difficulty breathing
Wheeze or persistent cough
Loss of consciousness
Vomiting or diarrhoea

WHAT IS ANAPHYLAXIS?

Anaphylaxis is the most severe, potentially life-threatening form of allergic reaction. Several factors can influence the severity of anaphylaxis including exercise, heat, alcohol, the amount of food eaten, and how food is prepared and consumed.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON ALLERGENS?

More than 170 foods have been found to trigger allergic reactions. However, in Australia 10 foods account for 90% of food allergic reactions. These are known as the 10 common allergens and include:

Peanuts	Tree nuts	Eggs	Cow’s milk	Wheat
Sesame	Fish	Shellfish	Soy	Lupin

HOW ARE FOOD ALLERGIES TREATED?

There is no cure for a food allergy. The only way to prevent an allergic reaction is by strictly avoiding the allergen. Life-threatening allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) require urgent medical attention. Adrenaline is the first line treatment for anaphylaxis and can be administered by an adrenaline auto-injector such as an EpiPen®.