

What is a food allergy?

If you have a food allergy, your **immune system** overreacts to a particular protein found in that food. Symptoms can occur when coming in contact with just a tiny amount of the food.

Many food allergies are first diagnosed in young children, though they may also appear in older children and adults.

Eight foods are responsible for the majority of **allergic reactions**:

- Cow's milk
- Eggs
- Fish
- Peanuts
- Shellfish
- Soy
- Tree nuts
- Wheat

Many people who think they are allergic to a food may actually be intolerant to it. Some of the symptoms of food intolerance and food allergy are similar, but the differences between the two are very important. If you are allergic to a food, this allergen triggers a response in the immune system. Food allergy reactions can be life-threatening, so people with this type of allergy must be very careful to avoid their food triggers.

Being allergic to a food may also result in being allergic to a similar protein found in something else. For example, if you are allergic to ragweed, you may also develop reactions to bananas or melons. This is known as cross-reactivity. Cross-reactivity happens when the immune system thinks one protein is closely related to another. When foods are involved it is called **oral allergy syndrome** (OAS).

Food allergy can strike children and adults alike. While many children outgrow a food allergy, it is also possible for adults to develop allergies to particular foods.

Source: AAAAI: The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
<https://www.aaaai.org>