



Residents with **Food Allergies & Intolerances**



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1.	Introduction	3
1.1.	What's the Difference between a Food Allergy and an Intolerance?	3
2.	Food allergies	4
2.1.	Symptoms of a Food Allergy	4
2.2.	What Foods cause Allergic Reactions?	5
2.3.	Catering for People with Allergies	7
2.3.1	General Points	7
2.3.2	Specific Allergens	8
	<i>Peanuts and Tree Nuts</i>	8
	<i>Sesame Seeds</i>	9
	<i>Egg</i>	9
	<i>Cows' Milk</i>	10
	<i>Fish and Shellfish</i>	11
3.	Food intolerances	11
3.1.	Lactose Intolerance	12
3.2.	Gluten Intolerance	13
3.2.1	Foods containing gluten	13
3.2.2	Treatment of Coeliac disease	14
3.2.3	Gluten vs Wheat Intolerance	14
3.2.4	Dermatitis Herpetiformis	15
3.3.	Other Food Intolerances	15
4.	Further Information	15

1. Introduction

1.1. What's the Difference between a Food Allergy and an Intolerance?

An allergy is a condition in which the sufferer reacts to a normally harmless substance (food, pollen or other substance) by producing antibodies. Antibodies are part of the body's normal reaction to harmful substances like viruses, such as the common cold. They enable the body to 'remember' previous harmful substances and react quickly to them on subsequent exposure. However, the body may react in this way to a harmless substance, such as food, producing antibodies and other cells or chemicals that cause the symptoms of an allergy. In some rare cases, these reactions may be fatal.

An intolerance is characterised by unpleasant symptoms occurring after eating a substance, due to the digestive system failing to produce sufficient chemicals or enzymes to break down and digest the food. The reaction, while unpleasant, is not mediated by antibodies and is not generally life threatening. The sections in this document discuss general issues for food allergies and intolerances and then give detail on specific foods and practical tips for catering for someone with an allergy.

2. Food Allergies

2.1 Symptoms of a Food Allergy

The symptoms of an allergic reaction can vary from person to person and from occasion to occasion.

Common symptoms include:

- Coughing
- Dry itchy throat or tongue
- Itchy skin or rash
- Nausea and bloating
- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Wheezing and shortness of breath
- Swelling of the lips and throat
- Runny or blocked nose
- Sore, red or itchy eyes
- Faintness and collapse

It is important to recognise these symptoms early, to ensure that any medication is administered quickly, before the symptoms worsen.

Anaphylaxis

A severe allergic reaction in which the entire body reacts to an allergen within minutes or hours of exposure is known as anaphylaxis. This is often in response to eating peanut or fish, although may also occur in response to other foods or non foods. The reaction is so severe that it can result in death if it is not treated quickly enough. Treatment is usually via an adrenaline (also known as epinephrine) shot. People at risk of this type of reaction must carry their medication with them at all times.

It is important to recognise the symptoms in someone who may be having a severe reaction such as an anaphylactic shock and have a crisis plan written down, specific to each resident with a severe allergy.

Other forms of allergy are reviewed below:

- Certain foods may cause reactions when they come into contact with the mouth or lips. This is known as oral allergy syndrome and occurs particularly in reaction to fruit and vegetables. It tends to occur more frequently in those people who are sensitive to some kinds of pollen.
- Some people who are allergic to one food may develop allergies to others that are related. This is known as cross reactivity. For example, someone who is allergic to peanuts, may also develop an allergy to other legumes such as soya, peas, lentils and beans.

2.2 What Foods Cause Allergic Reactions?

While any food in theory could cause an allergic reaction, European labelling legislation requires that the fourteen main allergens be labelled on food and drinks. These are detailed below:

- **Cereals containing gluten** (including wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt and kamut)
- **Crustaceans** (including crabs, lobsters and prawns)
- **Eggs**
- **Fish**
- **Lupin** (lupins are common garden plants and the seeds from some varieties are sometimes used to make flour)
- **Peanuts** (or groundnuts)
- **Soyabeans** (or soya)
- **Milk**
- **Tree nuts** (including such as almonds, hazelnuts, Brazil nuts, cashew nuts, pecans, pistachio nuts, macadamia nuts and Queensland nuts)
- **Celery**
- **Molluscs** (including mussels and oysters)
- **Mustard**
- **Sesame seeds**
- **Sulphur dioxide and sulphites**, at concentrations more than 10mg/kg or 10mg/l

Examples of products in which allergens may be unexpectedly present are given below:

- **Pesto** – may contain nuts
- **Salad dressings** – may contain unrefined nut oils
- **Cakes and desserts** – may contain marzipan or frangipane (both made from almonds) or praline (made from hazelnuts)
- **Sauces** – may contain milk or gluten-containing flour
- **Cheesecake** – bases may contain nuts
- **Indian dishes** – may be thickened with ground almonds or peanuts
- **Greek and Turkish dishes** – may contain nuts and seeds
e.g. tahini contains sesame seeds
- **Soyabean flour** – may be used in many products such as burgers, sausages, cakes, pastries and biscuits
- **Soyabean flour** – often also used in many vegetarian products, such as mince
- **Tofu** – made from soyabeans and often used in Chinese dishes
- **Mustard** – often used in dressings
- **Chinese and Thai foods** – often contain fish, oyster or soy sauce

Ordering and Storage:

- Keep a copy of the ingredient information for any ready made foods that are used
- Keep ingredients in their original containers or at least retain the ingredient and allergen listings alongside the product itself
- Check each delivery to ensure it tallies with the original order
- Check that the food is the same brand that is normally used, as different brands of the same product may have different ingredients
- Always store food in closed containers to minimise cross contamination. This is especially important for nuts, seeds, milk powder and flour

Always check the label and the ingredients for presence of any of these allergens. Note that the label may state that the product “may contain” the allergen. This is because the manufacturer may not be sure whether the product is free from that particular allergen. For example, the product may have been manufactured in an environment using that allergen, increasing the risk of contamination.

The only way to treat an allergy, is to avoid the food causing the effects. This is often difficult because the food, e.g. flour, milk, may be present in small amounts in many different products. Therefore, it is essential to read labels carefully before determining whether a food is safe for someone with an allergy.

2.3 Catering for People with Allergies

2.3.1 General Points

How do I know whether a certain food is in one of our dishes?

If a dish is made from scratch, then it is relatively easy to control what goes into it. However, take care when using some ingredients such as sauces, bouillons, pastes and other manufactured ingredients as these can often contain small amounts of allergens.

Also consider how:

- The dish is cooked (e.g. fat used to line tins)
- Sauces are thickened (e.g. using wheat flour, ground almonds)
- The meal is garnished (e.g. with chopped nuts)
- A salad is dressed (e.g. with dressing containing unrefined nut or seed oil, anchovies, milk etc)

Check the ingredients of any ready made products, whether they are meals, desserts, sauces etc. and do this regularly, as product recipes may change over time.

Preparation, Cooking and Cleaning

- Worktops and equipment should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and hot water before being used to prepare food for someone with an allergy. This includes chopping boards, knives, food mixers, bowls, pans and utensils used for stirring and serving. Even small amounts of allergen contaminating a dish can cause a reaction, so cleanliness is essential.
- Don't cook food in oil that has previously been used to cook other foods as this can lead to contamination. For example, cooking in oil that has been used to cook prawns or batter coated products may cause a reaction in someone who is allergic to fish or gluten.
- Washing hands prior to food preparation is essential in all cases but hand washing with soap and water, should also be performed before preparing food for someone with an allergy. Touching food that may contain allergens should also be avoided during preparation of an allergen free dish.
- Don't cook foods that can cause allergic reactions next to other foods as they are being cooked. For example, pastries containing nuts or seeds may contaminate other foods being baked in the same tray.

2.3.2 Specific Allergens

In all cases, it is essential to read the label to check a product's ingredients do not contain the allergen concerned.

Avoiding Peanuts and Tree Nuts

Peanuts may also be called ground or earth nuts or monkey nuts. People allergic to almonds should avoid almond essence. Foods likely to contain peanuts or tree nuts (other than the obvious nut butters etc) include:

- Cakes, biscuits, ice cream, desserts and pies
- Cereal bars, confectionery
- Vegetarian products such as burgers, cutlets and sausages
- Salads and salad dressings
- Satay sauce, curries, Chinese, Thai or Indonesian dishes
- Marzipan and praline

Avoiding Sesame Seeds

This allergy may be increasing in prevalence in the UK. It often goes hand in hand with a nut allergy.

Sesame may be found in the following products:

- Tahini (sesame based butter / spread)
- Gomashio (a flavouring made from salt and sesame seeds)
- Hummus (a dip made from chickpeas and sesame seeds)
- Unrefined sesame oil, sometimes used in Chinese cooking.
- Vegetarian products (vegeburgers, sausages, cutlets)
- Middle Eastern, Chinese and Japanese foods
- Breadsticks, rolls, biscuits and any other products that may be topped with sesame seeds

Avoiding Egg

It is only in rare cases that egg allergy causes anaphylaxis. In all other cases, the reaction is usually mild. Some people may only react to raw or partially cooked egg. While egg is frequently found in cakes, biscuits and egg based dishes such as omelettes, egg may be found in some of the products and ingredients below:

- Check dishes like fried rice, kedgeree, carbonara etc. as these traditionally contain egg
- Lecithin is an emulsifier used in some food products. While it is often derived from soya, it may also be derived from egg. Contact the retailer or manufacturer for details.
- Fresh pasta may contain egg but there are many dried varieties that do not.

Avoiding Cows' Milk

Milk allergy is often outgrown in young children. However, allergy to cows' milk may be lifelong and severe in a small proportion of cases. In a minority of cases, anaphylaxis will occur if even minute amounts are consumed. Other cases may be milder, with traces of milk in cooked products not causing a reaction. Bear in mind that, if milk or milk products come into contact with the skin of someone with a milk allergy, hives and skin rashes may occur.

Milk may be found in small or significant amounts in many unexpected products:

- Soups and sauces
- Battered and coated meat and fish products
- Cakes and pastries
- Butter, butter fat, buttermilk, ghee
- Casein and whey are milk products
- Cheese, yoghurt and other dairy products are derived from milk
- Ice cream
- Some medicines may contain milk products so check with the GP before medication is prescribed

Non-dairy products can be used to replace those containing cows' milk, such as soya milk and yoghurts, rice milk, oat milk and milk made from nuts (check for nut allergies).

Avoiding Fish and Shellfish

Allergy to fish and shellfish is usually lifelong and symptoms may develop rapidly and be severe. It is best to avoid all fish if someone is allergic to one type of fish and the same goes for shellfish, as the risk of cross contamination is high. It may in practice be advisable to avoid both fish and shellfish, due to the risk of cross contamination during processing and packing of the fish.

Types of shellfish:

- **Crustaceans** (crab, lobster, crayfish, shrimp, prawns)
- **Molluscs** (Bivalves (mussels, oyster, scallops, clams); gastropods (limpets, periwinkles, snails), cephalopods (squid, cuttlefish, octopus).

Dishes and products that may contain fish or shellfish include:

- Paella, kedgeree, bouillabaisse and some Oriental foods.
- Caesar salad dressing and Worcestershire sauce may contain anchovies.
- Fish sauce may contain both fish and shellfish and is used in many Oriental products.
- Some products contain shellfish shells and skeletons and so may be unsuitable for those with a shellfish allergy. These include supplements such as glucosamine, which is used to treat arthritis.

3. Food Intolerances

As described overleaf, food intolerances do not involve the immune system. Some reactions that are classed as intolerances are due to an inability to digest a particular food but in many cases, the reasons are not understood. The symptoms are not usually immediate but can be unpleasant and severe. While they may adversely affect long term health, they are not usually life threatening.

Common symptoms of a food intolerance are:

- Diarrhoea
- Weight loss
- Bloating / wind
- Anaemia
- Flushing
- Headache
- Hives
- Wheezing
- Runny nose

People with digestive problems such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) may cut out foods that they think exacerbate the problem, such as wheat or milk. This may not be helpful and may, in fact, lead to nutritional deficiencies. It is therefore important to seek medical advice before cutting out specific food groups in these cases.

The review below focuses on the most common foods to which people may be intolerant. As with food allergies, check all food labels to ensure that none of the ingredients to which someone has intolerance are present.

3.1 Lactose Intolerance

Lactose is a sugar present only in milk. Lactose intolerance is generally caused by a lack of the enzyme, lactase, which is required to break down the lactose before it is absorbed from the intestine. In the UK, around 5% of adults have lactose intolerance. Some may be able to cope with small amounts of milk in the diet, although this should be served with a meal, rather than alone. Hard cheeses in particular, contain low levels of lactose, so may be tolerated by some people and are a good source of calcium. The amounts an individual can tolerate will vary from person to person.

The only way to deal with lactose intolerance is to remove milk from the diet, either fully or partially, depending upon the individual's sensitivity. Follow the guidance given in section 2.3.2. on avoiding cows' milk.

3.2 Gluten Intolerance (Coeliac disease)

Coeliac disease is known as an auto-immune disease, where the body attacks its own tissues. In coeliac disease, this process is triggered by eating gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. The gluten activates the immune cells in the intestine, which then cause inflammation and damage to the intestinal wall. The result, if untreated, is a reduced ability to absorb nutrients from food, leading to weight loss and deficiencies in iron and calcium for example.

The symptoms experienced are similar to the general ones above but may also include:

- Nausea
- Wind
- Tiredness
- Constipation
- Skin problems

3.2.1 Foods Containing Gluten

Cereals that contain gluten may be used in many different foods, including bread, pasta, pizza, breakfast cereals, pastry and cakes. Other less obvious products that may contain wheatbased or gluten-containing ingredients are shown below:

- Sausages
- Burgers
- Sauces and stock cubes / bouillons / gravy
- Soy sauce
- Foods in batter or breadcrumbs
- Malt extract or flavouring is manufactured from barley and used widely in breakfast cereals, ready meals, confectionery and snack products. The amount of gluten from malt in these products varies and some coeliacs can tolerate low levels of gluten from this source e.g. malted rice breakfast cereals and malt vinegar
- Drinks made from barley, such as beer, lager and whiskey

Cross contamination is likely in bakeries and other floury environments and also in factories where cereals are produced or mixed. Oats are often contaminated with gluten, but most coeliacs eat uncontaminated oats which will be labelled gluten free.

3.2.2 Treatment of Coeliac Disease

There is no cure for coeliac disease and the only treatment is to completely avoid gluten. If the condition is uncontrolled, it can affect absorption of nutrients (because the intestine lining is affected by the gluten causing an autoimmune reaction), leading to malnutrition, anemia and bone disease.

The gluten-free diet is made up of:-

- 'Everyday Foods' such as meat, fish, fruit and vegetables, rice potatoes and lentils.
- Processed foods that are free from gluten containing ingredients - check product packaging carefully before serving.
- Gluten-free substitute foods such as specially made gluten-free bread, flour, pasta, crackers and biscuits

3.2.3 Gluten vs Wheat Intolerance

Products that are labelled 'wheat free' are not necessarily gluten free, as they may contain other cereals such as barley and rye, which also contain gluten. They are therefore not always suitable for coeliac, unless they are also labelled 'gluten free'.

Gluten free products contain no more than 20 parts of gluten per million, but may contain other components of wheat that may affect someone with a wheat allergy or intolerance.

Some ingredients, such as glucose syrup and dextrose may have been derived from wheat. However, they are so highly processed that the levels of gluten are very low and they can therefore be eaten safely.

3.2.4 Dermatitis Herpetiformis

Dermatitis herpetiformis (DH) is a skin condition caused by gluten intolerance. It affects fewer people than coeliac disease (around 1 in 10000).

Symptoms are:

- Red raised patches often with blisters.
- Severe itching and stinging.
- Rash on the elbows, knees and buttocks.

DH is treated with a gluten free diet, although drug treatment may be required at the first onset.

3.3 Other Food Intolerances

Other foods that may cause intolerances include wheat, some food additives and caffeine. In all cases, it is important to seek advice from a specialist medical professional, such as a dietician, before attempting to cut particular foods from the diet.

For example, a suspected wheat intolerance may, in fact, be related to the effects of gluten. Intolerance to food additives is rare. However, many people think they are affected by additives when they may not actually have a genuine intolerance. The most common additives that have been linked to intolerance are artificial colours such as tartrazine, preservatives such as sulphites, metabisulphites and benzoates and the flavour enhancer monosodium glutamate (MSG).

4. Further Information

Allergy UK - www.allergyfoundation.com

The Anaphylaxis Campaign - www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

The British Dietetic Association - www.bda.uk.com

The British Nutrition Foundation - www.nutrition.org.uk

Coeliac UK - www.coeliac.org.uk



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