

# Allergy and Immunology

## PEANUT ALLERGY

Peanuts contain protein that can cause an allergic reaction in around 3% of children. The severity of reactions to peanuts can vary. Mild reactions are most common and consist of hives, abdominal pain and vomiting. Anaphylaxis is the most severe reaction and can be life threatening. It can involve difficulty breathing, throat swelling or a drop in blood pressure. In Australia peanut is one of the most common foods to cause anaphylaxis.

### WILL MY CHILD GROW OUT OF THEIR ALLERGY?

Around one in five children can outgrow their peanut allergy by the teenage years. The doctors will determine whether your child has grown out of the peanut allergy by a combination of allergy testing and food challenge. Food challenges should only be performed by experienced medical staff with emergency resuscitation medications and facilities available.

### HOW DO YOU TREAT PEANUT ALLERGY?

There is currently no cure for food allergy. If your child has confirmed peanut allergy avoiding foods that contain peanuts is only way to prevent symptoms.

### HOW SHOULD MY CHILD AVOID PEANUT?

This involves knowing the common food sources of peanut, how to read food labels and knowledge of possible sources of contamination with peanut. Although peanuts are a good source of protein, iron and some vitamins, removing them from the diet has little effect on overall nutritional intake for most children.

Sources of Peanut	Common Sources of Peanut (check carefully)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arachis oil</li> <li>• Beer nuts</li> <li>• Baklava, Greek pastry</li> <li>• Crushed nuts on top of cakes, fruit buns, ice cream and desserts</li> <li>• Ground nuts</li> <li>• Madelonas</li> <li>• Mixed nuts</li> <li>• Monkey nuts</li> <li>• Nut biscuits</li> <li>• Nut filled chocolates</li> <li>• Nut meat</li> <li>• Nu-nuts</li> <li>• Peanut butter</li> <li>• Peanut brittle</li> <li>• Peanut flour</li> <li>• Peanut and Satay Sauce</li> <li>• Peanut oil</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christmas Cakes and puddings</li> <li>• Curry pastes</li> <li>• Dukkah</li> <li>• Energy mixes or trail mix</li> <li>• Flavoured cheeses</li> <li>• Fruit crumble mix</li> <li>• Muesli and breakfast cereal</li> <li>• Muesli bars and health bars</li> <li>• Natural flavourings</li> <li>• Nougat, fudge, praline, Rocky Road and Turkish delight</li> <li>• Pasta sauces</li> <li>• Pesto</li> <li>• Restaurant and Takeaway meals – especially Asian, African and Indian meals</li> <li>• Salad dressings</li> <li>• Textured or hydrolysed vegetable protein</li> <li>• Vegetarian meals</li> </ul>

Products at high risk of being contaminated with peanuts	Non-food sources of peanut
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baked goods</li> <li>• Breakfast cereal</li> <li>• Chocolate</li> <li>• Ice creams</li> <li>• Restaurant or takeaway meals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animal and bird feeds</li> <li>• Cosmetics and massage oils (check for arachnis oil)</li> <li>• Prometrium (peanut derived progesterone cream)</li> </ul>

### Do I need to avoid the following foods when I have a peanut allergy?

Food	Does it need to be avoided?
<b>Other nuts such as cashew, almond, hazelnuts etc.</b>	Children with peanut allergy have a 1 in 5 chance of being allergic to other nuts. Your doctor will tell you which nuts you should avoid based on allergy testing, your child's age and severity of past reactions.
<b>Peanut and other nut oils</b>	Refined nut oils (not cold pressed) have been shown to be safe for people with nut allergies as the protein is removed during processing. Unfortunately it can be difficult to determine how well the oil is processed. It is best to avoid all forms of nut oils if your child have a severe nut allergy.
<b>Coconut and Nutmeg</b>	<b>NO.</b> Coconut comes from the seed of the palm and nutmeg is obtained from the seed of the drupaceous fruit.
<b>Water chestnuts</b>	<b>NO.</b> Despite the name water chestnuts are not a nut and come from the edible portion of a plant root.
<b>Beans, legumes and pulses</b>	<b>NO.</b> Although soy, lentils and peas come from the same family as peanuts, the majority of peanut allergic people can eat these foods safely.
<b>Sesame Seeds</b>	Allergy to sesame seed occurs in some children with a nut allergy. If your child has an allergic reaction to sesame seeds these should be avoided. Hummus dip and tahini are made from sesame seeds and should be avoided in sesame seed allergy.

## LABEL READING

### Ingredients List

All packaged foods must have an ingredients list and it is law that all common food allergens (peanut, tree nut, seafood, fish, milk, eggs, soybeans and wheat) must be clearly identified, however small the amount.

**Example:** instead of simply listing satay sauce the ingredients list should read "satay sauce (peanut)". The product may also contain a statement at the end of the ingredients list which states "this product contains peanuts"

**ALWAYS** check the ingredients list every time you buy the food as the ingredients of the product may change. Be aware that other words may be used for peanut in other countries.

### **“May contain traces of peanut” statements**

These statements are used by manufacturers to indicate that the product may be contaminated with peanut through processing and packaging. At present these statements are voluntary and there are no clear guidelines for companies regarding how and when to use them. The wording of the statements makes it very difficult to determine your level of risk and a product that does not contain the statement may be no safer than a product that does. The chances of having a severe allergic reaction through contamination during processing are extremely unlikely. However, people with severe or anaphylactic reactions should use these products with caution. The only safe alternative is extremely limiting as it would be to not include any commercial food products in your child's diet. For children with severe allergic reactions companies can be contacted directly to explore food processing, packaging and cleaning procedures.

**Products labelled as “May be present” have undergone more robust assessment and should be avoided.**

### **SOURCES OF CONTAMINATION WITH PEANUT**

Casual skin contact with peanut is most unlikely to cause a significant reaction.

- Children with severe reactions to peanut can react as a result of contamination to cooking surfaces and utensils such as knives, kitchen sponges, barbeques and benchtops with peanut.
- Margarine and butter containers can also be sources of contamination with nut products, particularly peanut butter.
- Picking nuts out of foods will still leave trace amounts of nut protein in the product and is not recommended.
- Crèche, day care centres and kindergartens may recommend hand washing after meals to prevent the transfer of trace amounts of peanut butter from hands to toys and craft materials etc.

### **EATING OUT**

Many cuisines can contain peanut, particularly African, Asian, Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Indonesian, Mexican and Thai. Eating at restaurants or buying takeaway meals is a common source of accidental exposure to peanut. Inform staff when booking at restaurants that you need to avoid nuts and when ordering clarify ingredients and cooking methods with the waiting staff or chef.

### **SCHOOL, PRESCHOOL AND CHILDCARE CENTRES**

Children should take their own peanut free food with them to school and should be discouraged from swapping or sharing food. Banning specific foods will not eliminate the risk of accidental exposure and cannot be enforced. However, food restrictions with appropriate education and communication, may have a role to play in very young children who have insufficient maturity to protect themselves (eg: childcare through to early primary school or children with developmental delay). The use of peanut containing foods in cooking classes and science experiments is discouraged if there

are children with peanut allergy in the class. Pay particular care to arrangements for out of the ordinary events such as school camps, excursions and fetes.

Communication of your child's allergies to teachers and carers through the use of Action Plans is essential.

**For further information refer to:**

**ASCIA** (The Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy) is the peak professional body of Clinical Immunologists and Allergists in Australia and New Zealand.

Their website contains a wide range of information including Guidelines for prevention of food anaphylactic reactions in schools, preschools and childcare centres and Action plans - [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

**Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia:** a non-profit organisation that provides information, training and support. Membership provides you with access to local support groups and seminars, quarterly newsletters and discounts on resources. Website contains outlines on each states policy on managing food allergies in schools, preschools and childcare facilities - [www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

**FSANZ** (Food Standards Australia and New Zealand): for information on food labelling - [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

**Disclaimer**

**The food and ingredient lists included in this resource are not exhaustive and may change, individuals with food allergy should always check food labels each time a product is purchased.**

**This resource is intended to accompany a medical consultation regarding the management of a diagnosed food allergy.**