

Allergy and Immunology

WHEAT ALLERGY

Wheat contains a number of different proteins. Allergic reactions to wheat can result from reactions to one or more of these proteins. If your child has a confirmed wheat allergy, strict avoidance of wheat containing foods is the only way to prevent symptoms. Wheat is used widely in the foods we eat therefore it is important to read and understand food labels to be able to choose foods that are safe for your child. There are many different grains available and some of these will also need to be avoided as they are a form of wheat or contain similar proteins to wheat.

WILL MY CHILD GROW OUT OF THEIR WHEAT ALLERGY?

Many children will grow out of their wheat allergy. By adolescence approximately 2/3 children will outgrow their wheat allergy. If your child has a type of allergy that can be diagnosed with allergy testing this may be used to monitor your child's allergies. The doctors will determine whether your child has outgrown their allergy by a combination of allergy testing and food challenge with wheat. A positive allergy test may not always show whether your child will have symptoms when they eat wheat products. A challenge with wheat may be the only way to determine if your child has outgrown their wheat allergy. Challenges may need to be done in a hospital by experienced medical staff. Do not do challenges at home unless instructed by your doctor.

IS WHEAT ALLERGY DIFFERENT FROM COELIAC DISEASE?

One of the proteins present in wheat and some other cereals is called gluten. Coeliac disease is a condition where the lining of the small intestine is damaged by an immunological reaction as a result of exposure to gluten.

The treatment for Coeliac disease involves the strict avoidance of all gluten containing cereals including wheat, barley, oats and rye. Coeliac disease is a lifelong condition. In contrast, children with a wheat allergy may react to components of wheat which are different from gluten and therefore may tolerate other grains that contain gluten such as rye and oats. Children usually grow out of their wheat allergy whereas coeliac disease is a lifelong condition. Products labelled as gluten free can also be included in a wheat free diet as gluten free products do not contain any wheat proteins. If your child has multiple food allergies be aware that gluten free products often contain egg or milk.

HOW DO YOU TREAT WHEAT ALLERGY?

There is currently no treatment for food allergy. If your child has confirmed wheat allergy avoiding foods that contain wheat is the only way to prevent symptoms.

HOW CAN MY CHILD AVOID WHEAT?

Avoiding wheat involves knowing the common food sources of wheat, how to read food labels and what other grains are suitable replacements for wheat.

Foods that contain wheat	Foods likely to contain wheat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Atta Flour (Indian wheat flour) • Baked products such as biscuits, cakes, pancakes, pastry • Battered or crumbed foods • Bread • Bulgar • Burghul • Cous cous • Durum wheat • Farina • Graham flour • Ice cream cones and wafers • Kamut • Matzoh • Pretzels • Seitan • Semolina • Soups with pasta or noodles • Spelt • Teething rusks • Triticale • Wheat berry • Wheat flour • Wheat germ, bran, meal, starch • Wheat pasta • Wheat noodles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baked goods • Breakfast cereals • Confectionary • Chicken stuffing and skin • Flavoured crisps • Flavoured milk powders, coffee creamers and whiteners • Icing sugar mixture • Mustard • Pastry • Playdough • Processed meats and sandwich meats • Rissoles and sausages • seasonings • Dry roasted nuts • Gravy, stock cubes and sauces • Soups • Soy sauce • Surimi (crab sticks, seafood replacer)

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 maltodextrin the ingredients list should read maltodextrin (wheat) or wheat maltodextrin.

ALWAYS check the ingredients list every time you buy the food as the ingredients of the product may change.

Do all wheat based ingredients need to be avoided?

No. Some ingredients made from wheat are so well processed that all the wheat proteins which trigger the allergic reaction have been removed. These products are still labelled as containing wheat. The chance of an allergic reaction to these ingredients is very unlikely. These ingredients include **glucose, glucose syrup, dextrose, caramel colour and monosodium glutamate.**

What about “May contain traces of wheat” statements

These statements are used by manufacturers to indicate that the product may be contaminated with wheat 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 significant allergic reaction through contamination during processing is extremely unlikely. For children at risk of 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 for those with severe wheat reactions.

WHAT CAN I USE INSTEAD OF WHEAT IN MY CHILD’S DIET?

Wheat is a common cereal grain and forms the basis of many of our staple foods in Australia such as breads, breakfast cereals, pasta and baked goods. These foods are an important source of carbohydrate, vitamins and fibre in your child’s diet. It is important to replace staple foods such as wheat based breads, pasta and breakfast cereals with suitable alternatives to ensure your child has a balanced diet.

There are many other grain choices available to replace wheat in the diet. Some of these grains (such as rye, oat and barley) contain some similar proteins to wheat and may also result in reactions for some people with a wheat allergy. Some people may also be allergic to multiple grains so it is recommended that each grain type is trialled individually.

	Grain Types	Comments
Avoid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kamut • Triticale • Spelt • Semolina 	Types of wheat
May be tolerated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rye • Oat • Barley 	Around 20% of people with wheat allergy can be allergic to these grains. Discuss with your doctor.
Alternatives for wheat		Trial each grain individually

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amaranth • Arrowroot • Buckwheat • Chia flour • Chickpea or Besan flour • Corn or Maize • Lupin flour • Millet • Polenta • Potato Flour • Quinoa • Rice • Sago • Sorghum • Soy Flour • Tapioca 	
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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

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

FSANZ (Food Standards Australia and New Zealand): for information on food labeling - 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.