

# FOOD ALLERGY AND FOOD INTOLERANCE – WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

## What is a 'food allergy'?

When you are allergic to a food substance, your **immune system** reacts to that substance as though it's toxic by releasing chemicals (such as histamine) into the body's tissues. The resulting effect on the body can be severe, and in some cases life threatening.

Researchers estimate that 1 in 20 children and 1 in 100 adults have a food allergy. Most children who have a food allergy will grow out of it. However, allergies to peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish are more likely to last a lifetime. If you think your child might have grown out of a food allergy, see a doctor or an allergist for an assessment. Do not experiment at home. To re-introduce a food requires appropriate supervision from a doctor because there is a continued risk of severe or life-threatening allergic reactions

## What is histamine?

Histamine is a substance released by your immune system during an allergic reaction. It can cause a range of symptoms, including itchy eyes, throat and inner ears; sneezing; asthma; rashes; eczema; upset stomachs; and diarrhoea.

## What is a 'food intolerance'?

A food intolerance is a reaction to a substance in the food you're eating. Unlike allergies, intolerances have nothing to do with your immune system. Intolerance reactions are generally less severe than allergic reactions, but can still cause discomfort – including an increase in migraine headaches, skin rashes or gastrointestinal symptoms. It is advisable to speak with your doctor to identify if the symptoms you are experiencing are due to food intolerance.

Common food allergies	Common food intolerances
<p>About 90% of food allergies are caused by seven types of food:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cows' milk</li> <li>• hens' eggs</li> <li>• soybeans</li> <li>• peanuts</li> <li>• tree nuts (e.g. almond, brazil, cashew)</li> <li>• wheat</li> <li>• fish and shellfish.</li> </ul> <p>The remaining 10% of allergies are caused by a wide variety of other foods.</p>	<p>The most common food intolerances are caused by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dairy products</li> <li>• food additives (including flavour enhancers such as monosodium glutamate, otherwise known as MSG)</li> <li>• strawberries</li> <li>• citrus fruit</li> <li>• tomatoes</li> <li>• red wine and other foods containing histamines.</li> </ul>

## For more information

<http://raisingchildren.net.au>

<http://www.cs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/allergy/resources/foodintol/ffintro.cfm> (Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Allergy Unit – Food allergies & intolerance)

<http://www.allergy.org.au/content/view/10/3/> (The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy – Anaphylaxis resources)

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