



Allergies: Foods

While there is no cure for a food allergy, diet, and medication can help an individual control allergic reactions and live a healthy life.

Food Allergies

A food allergy occurs when a person's immune system incorrectly identifies a food as harmful and creates specific antibodies to fight off that food. The next time that particular food is eaten, large amounts of chemicals are released in an attempt to protect the body. These chemicals cause the allergic symptoms. Research suggests that 90% of all allergic reactions are caused by foods, including milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy, and wheat.

Food allergies are most common in the first few years of life due to immaturity of the digestive system, but sensitivity typically declines by age 10. Food allergies are commonly found in people with a family medical history of asthma, dermatitis, or pollen, and mold allergies.

Signs and Symptoms

The symptoms of a food allergy usually occur within minutes or up to two hours after eating the allergy-causing food and can include:

- A tingling sensation in the mouth
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, and throat
- Itching, hives and a rash throughout the body
- Cramping, diarrhea, or vomiting
- Wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Nasal congestion
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Loss of consciousness

Treatment

No medications are currently available that cure food allergies. Fortunately, once you identify which foods trigger your allergies, you can avoid those foods and prevent an allergic reaction. However, in the case of anaphylaxis (a sudden and severe allergic reaction), epinephrine should be administered as soon as possible. A health professional can administer this medication in an urgent care facility or emergency room, or if prescribed by a physician, it can be self-injected into the body as soon as symptoms appear.

Prevention

Get into the habit of knowing what is in the food you make and order. When shopping and preparing food, check ingredient labels. Many companies will list if their products are processed in a plant that contains nuts. When eating out, be sure to ask about ingredients and food preparation so you know what to expect.