



FOOD ALLERGY BASICS

- Food allergy is a growing public health and food safety concern in the U.S. Scientists are reporting an increase in food allergy over the past decade. In particular, peanut allergy among young children doubled between 1997-2002.
- Approximately 12 million Americans suffer from food allergy, with 6.9 million allergic to seafood and 3.3 million allergic to peanut or tree nuts.
- Food allergy is the leading cause of anaphylaxis (a severe allergic reaction) outside the hospital setting. Other causes of anaphylaxis include exercise, insect sting, latex, medication, and idiopathic reactions (no cause identified).
- Eight foods account for 90% of all reactions in the U.S.: milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (walnuts, almonds, cashews, pistachios, pecans, etc.), wheat, soy, fish, and shellfish.
- There is no cure for food allergy. Strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food is the only way to prevent a reaction.
- Food allergy reactions result in over 30,000 emergency room visits each year.
- It is estimated that between 150 and 200 people die annually from anaphylaxis to food; including children and young adults.
- Approximately 2.2 million school-aged children have food allergy.
- One in every 17 children under the age of 3 has food allergy.
- Teens and young adults with peanut or tree nut allergy and asthma appear to be at increased risk for severe or fatal allergic reactions.
- Trace amounts of the food allergen can cause a reaction. Patients should be on guard for hidden ingredients (such as milk or peanuts) in unsuspected places such as candy, baked goods, trail mixes, sauces, desserts, and gravies, to name just a few.
- Most individuals who have had a reaction ate a food they *thought* was safe.
- Studies have shown that early administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) is key to successfully treating anaphylactic reactions. Epinephrine is available by prescription as EpiPen[®] or Twinject[®].
- The majority of patients don't have written plans from their doctor for preventing and treating reactions.

These statistics are estimates for the U.S. only.