

# *Know More about* **Food Allergy**





# 1. What is a food allergy?

Food allergy is a reaction of the body immune system to something in a food --- usually a protein. Common symptoms include skin irritations (e.g. rashes), gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g. nausea, diarrhoea and vomiting), sneezing nose and shortness of breath. In addition, sulphiting agents which can be used in food as preservatives may cause asthma in asthmatic patients or people with allergic conditions. The symptoms and severity vary among individuals. Symptoms typically appear within minutes to an hour after eating, and can last for days or even weeks.



# 2. What are food allergens?

Food allergens are the foods that cause an allergy. The eight most common food allergens are milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish. They account for more than 90% of all food allergic reactions. However, many other foods have been identified as allergens for some people.



# 3. Do I have a food allergy?

Some people suffer from diarrhoea every time after drinking milk, however, it may not be a true food allergy. It can be due to the lack of an enzyme that is needed to digest milk sugar. In fact, of all the individuals who have adverse reactions to certain foods, only few have true food allergies. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 1-3% of adults and 4-6% of children suffer from food allergies. One should seek medical advice if an adverse reaction to a certain food is suspected.

# 4. Why should food allergens be labelled?

Currently, there is no cure for food allergy. A severe food allergy can be life-threatening. Strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food is the only way to avoid a reaction. Individuals with food allergies need to rely on an accurate food label to choose food. Thus, the labelling of allergens in food is important and necessary.

# 5. What allergens must be labelled under the regulations?

The Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) Regulations require that the names of the following known allergens present in a prepackaged food must be specified in the ingredient list:

- (i) cereals containing gluten (namely wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt, their hybridized strains and their products);
- (ii) crustacea and crustacean products;



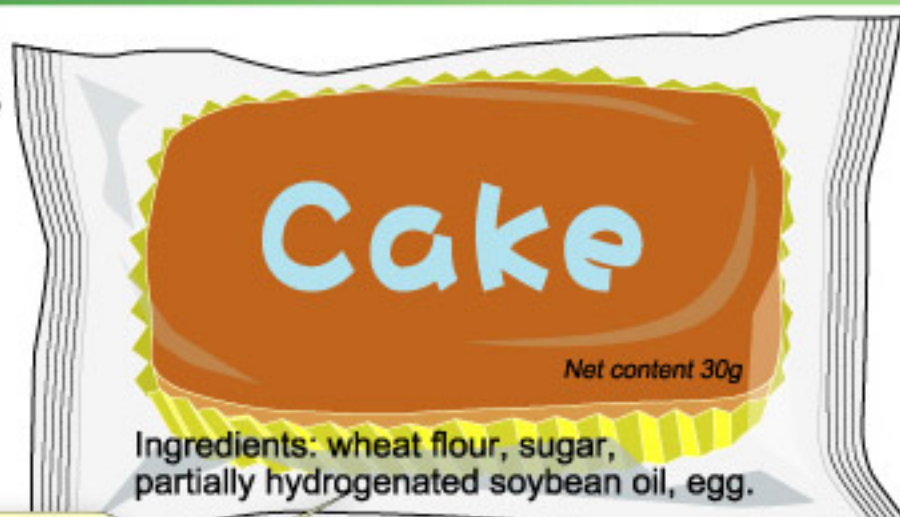
- (iii) eggs and egg products;
- (iv) fish and fish products;
- (v) peanuts, soybeans and their products;
- (vi) milk and milk products (including lactose);
- (vii) tree nuts and nut products.

In addition, if a food consists of or contains sulphite in a concentration of 10 parts per million or more, the functional class of the sulphite and its name shall be specified in the list of ingredients.

The above requirement was enacted in July 2004. The three-year grace period will lapse on 9 July 2007.

## 6. How do the labels of allergens look like?

If a food contains any food allergens specified in law as ingredients, these allergens are usually labelled in the ingredient list in the way just like any other ingredients are. All ingredients are labelled in descending order of their weights or volumes.



Ingredients : wheat flour, sugar, partially hydrogenated soybean oil, egg.

When an ingredient, by its name, is not easily identified by consumers as allergens, supplementary information is added next to its name.



Ingredients: water, onion, beef stock, corn oil, salt, whey protein (milk product).



In some food products, no allergen is used as an ingredient but these products are produced on a production line with other products containing an allergen or in a factory where an allergen specified in law is also handled.

Manufacturers should take precautions to prevent products from being contaminated by allergens. If after taking all reasonable

precautions, the chance of cross-contamination still cannot be ruled out, there may be a warning statement marked next to the ingredient list.



Ingredients : sugar, cocoa butter, milk powder, cocoa mass.

"May contain traces of peanuts"

## 7. What should people suffering from food allergies note?

People suffering from food allergies should read the food labels carefully when purchasing food and ask the suppliers for further information if in doubt on the food composition. When eating out, explain your situation and needs clearly to the food providers. If feeling unwell after eating, seek medical treatment immediately.

### Enquiries

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