

Allergy and Immunology

PEANUT AND TREE NUT ALLERGY

The term tree nuts refers to nuts other than peanut and includes – **almond, brazil nut, cashew, hazelnut, macadamia, pecan, pistachio and walnut**. Peanuts and tree nuts (nuts) contain proteins that can cause an allergic reaction in around 2-3% of children. The severity of reactions to nuts can vary. In Australia peanut is one of the most common foods to cause anaphylaxis. In Australia peanut and tree nuts, especially cashew are one of the most common foods to cause anaphylaxis.

DOES MY CHILD HAVE TO AVOID ALL NUTS?

Around 20-30% of people with a peanut allergy also have allergies to one or more tree nuts. Some doctors may initially recommend avoidance of all nuts until each nut has been individually allergy tested and/or food challenges are done. Your doctor will tell you which nuts you should avoid based on allergy testing, your child's age and severity of past reactions.

WILL MY CHILD GROW OUT OF THEIR NUT ALLERGIES?

Recent studies show that around 20% of children can outgrow their peanut allergy and around 10% their tree nut allergy by the teenage years. The doctors will determine whether your child has grown out of their nut allergies by a combination of allergy testing and food challenge. Food challenges should only be performed by experienced medical staff with emergency resuscitation medications and facilities available.

HOW DO YOU TREAT NUT ALLERGIES?

There is currently no cure for food allergy. If your child has confirmed nut allergies avoiding foods that contain nuts is the only way to prevent symptoms.

HOW CAN MY CHILD AVOID NUTS?

Avoidance of nuts involves knowing the common food sources of nuts, how to read food labels and knowledge of possible sources of contamination with nut. Although nuts are a good source of protein, iron and some vitamins, removing them from the diet has little effect on overall nutritional intake for most children.

AVOIDING PEANUT AND TREE NUTS

Sources of Peanut and Tree nuts	Common Sources of Peanut and Tree Nuts (check carefully)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almonds • Almond Paste • Almond Meal • Amoretto • Arachis oil • Artificial nuts • Bitter almond • Baklava, Greek pastry commonly containing walnut • Beer nuts • Brazil nuts • Bunya nuts • Candle nuts • Carponata (Italian dish containing almonds) • Cashews • Crushed nuts on top of cakes, fruit buns, ice cream and desserts • Gianduja • Ground nuts • Hazelnut (Filbert or Cob Nut) • Indian nuts • Macadamia Nuts • Macaroons • Macadamia (Queensland nut, candlenut) • Madelonas Mixed nuts • Mixed nuts • Monkey nuts • Non-gai nuts • Nut extract or flavourings • Nut meal • Nut meat • Nut oils • Nut spreads or butters • Peanut butter • Peanut brittle • Peanut flour • Peanut and Satay Sauce • Peanut oil Pecan (Hickory Nut or Mashuga) • Pistachios • Shea nuts • Walnuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baked goods such as cakes and slices • Biscuits and cookies • Breakfast cereals • Christmas Cakes and puddings • Chocolate • Chocolate spreads • Curry pastes • Dips and flavoured cheeses • Dried fruit and trail mixes • Dukkah • Energy mixes or trail mix • Fruit crumble mix • Flavoured coffee syrups • Icecream • Marzipan • Muesli bars and health bars • Natural flavourings • Nougat, fudge, praline, Rocky Road and Turkish delight • Pasta sauces • Pesto • Restaurant and Takeaway meals – especially Asian, African and Indian meals • Salads and salad dressings • Stuffing • Vegetarian meals

Products at high risk of being contaminated with nuts	Non-food sources of nuts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baked goods • Breakfast cereal • Chocolate • Ice creams • Restaurant or takeaway meals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Animal and bird feeds • Cosmetics and massage oils (check for arachnis oil) • Prometrium (peanut derived progesterone cream)

Do I need to avoid the following foods when I have a nut allergy?

Food	Does it need to be avoided?
Nut oils	Refined nut oils (not cold pressed) have been shown to be safe for people with nut allergies as the protein is removed during processing. Unfortunately it can be difficult to determine how well the oil is processed. It is best to avoid all forms of nut oils if your child have a severe nut allergy.
Coconut and Nutmeg	NO. Coconut comes from the seed of the palm and nutmeg is obtained from the seed of the drupaceous fruit.
Water chestnuts	NO. Despite the name water chestnuts are not a nut and come from the edible portion of a plant root.
Pine nut	Pine nut is a seed and the majority of people with nut allergy can eat pine nuts. Other names for pine nut include (pinyon nuts and pignolia nuts).
Chestnuts	Chestnuts are in a different botanical category to peanuts and also to tree nuts and most people with chestnut allergy can tolerate peanuts and tree nuts. Chestnut allergy has been reported but is rare in Australia.
Beans, legumes and pulses	NO. Although soy, lentils and peas come from the same family as peanuts, the majority of peanut allergic people can eat these foods safely.
Sesame Seeds	Allergy to sesame seed occurs in some children with a nut allergy. If your child has an allergic reaction to sesame seeds these should be avoided. Hummus dip and tahini are made from sesame seeds and should be avoided in sesame seed allergy.

LABEL READING

Ingredients List

All packaged foods must have an ingredients list. You must check this ingredients list for any ingredients that may contain peanut or tree nuts. It is law that all common food allergens (peanut, tree nut, seafood, fish, milk, eggs, soybeans and wheat) be clearly identified, however small the amount.

Example: instead of simply listing satay sauce the ingredients list should read “satay sauce (peanut). The product may also contain a statement at the end of the ingredients list which states “this product contains peanuts and/or tree nuts”

Check the ingredients list carefully for any ingredients that contain peanut or tree nuts every time you buy the food as the ingredients of the product may change. Be aware that other words may be used for peanut in other countries.

“May contain traces of peanut and/or tree nut” statements

These statements are used by manufacturers to indicate that the product may be contaminated with nut 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 severe allergic reaction through contamination during processing are extremely unlikely. However, people with severe or anaphylactic reactions should use these products with caution. The only safe alternative is extremely limiting as it would be to not include any commercial food products in your child’s diet. For children with 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.

SOURCES OF CONTAMINATION WITH NUTS

Casual skin contact with peanut or tree nuts is most unlikely to cause a severe reaction.

- Children with severe reactions to nuts can react as a result of contamination to cooking surfaces and utensils such as knives, kitchen sponges, barbecues and benchtops with nut.
- Margarine and butter containers can also be sources of contamination with nut products, particularly peanut butter and other nut spreads.
- Picking nuts out of foods will still leave trace amounts of nut protein in the product and is not recommended.
- Crèche, day care centres and kindergartens may recommend hand washing after meals to prevent the transfer of trace amounts of peanut butter from hands to toys and craft materials etc.

EATING OUT

Many cuisines can contain nuts, particularly African, Asian, Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Indonesian, Mexican and Thai. Eating at restaurants or buying takeaway meals is a common source of accidental exposure to nut. Inform staff when booking at restaurants that you need to avoid nuts and when ordering clarify ingredients and cooking methods with the waiting staff or chef.

SCHOOL, PRESCHOOL AND CHILDCARE CENTRES

Children should take their own peanut/tree nut free food with them to school and should be discouraged from swapping or sharing food. Banning specific foods will not eliminate the risk of accidental exposure and cannot be enforced. However, food restrictions with appropriate education and communication, may have a role to play in very young children who have insufficient maturity to protect themselves (eg: childcare through to early primary school or children with developmental delay). The use of peanut containing foods in cooking classes and science experiments is discouraged if there are children with peanut and/or tree nut allergy in the class. Pay particular care to arrangements for out of the ordinary events such as school camps, excursions and fetes.

Communication of your child's allergies to teachers and carers through the use of Action Plans is essential.

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

Allergy & 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 labelling - 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.