

# Allergy and Immunology

## PEANUT ALLERGY

Peanuts contain protein that can cause an allergic reaction in 1-2% of children. The severity of reactions to peanuts can vary. Mild reactions are most common and consist of hives, abdominal pain and vomiting. More sensitive children can develop anaphylaxis. This is a reaction that involves the breathing system and the heart system and can involve difficulty breathing, throat swelling or a drop in blood pressure. In Australia peanut is one of the most common foods to cause anaphylaxis.

The only proven treatment for peanut allergy is strict avoidance. This can be difficult as peanut can be an unlikely ingredient in many commercial food products.

### **What about other nuts?**

Children with peanut allergy have about a 1 in 5 chance of being allergic to other nuts. Your doctor will tell you which nuts you should avoid based on allergy testing, your child's age and severity of reactions.

- Some allergy doctors may initially recommend avoidance of all nuts until each nut has been individually allergy tested and/or food challenges are done.
- In general avoidance of all nuts may also be recommended for young children (<2yrs) unrelated to allergy, because of the risk of inhalation or choking on whole nuts.
- Severely sensitive children may also be advised to avoid all tree nuts as well due to the possibility of unrecognised nut substitution in commercial food products, contamination during processing or uncertain nut labelling.

### **Will my child grow out of their allergy?**

Although once considered to be a lifelong allergy, recent studies show that up to one half of children can outgrow their peanut allergy by the teenage years. The doctors will determine whether your child has grown out of the peanut allergy by a combination of skin testing and food challenge. Food challenges should only be performed by experienced medical staff with emergency resuscitation medications and facilities available.

### **What is peanut immunotherapy?**

Peanut immunotherapy is an investigational technique whereby peanut allergic children are gradually exposed to increasing amounts of peanut by mouth in an attempt to switch off the peanut allergic response. At the present time the technique is still under investigation for both its usefulness and safety.

<b>AVOIDING PEANUT AND TREE NUTS</b>	
<b>Sources of Peanut</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peanut butter</li> <li>• Peanut and Satay Sauce</li> <li>• Nut biscuits</li> <li>• Crushed nuts on top of cakes, fruit buns, ice cream and desserts</li> <li>• Baklava, Greek pastry</li> <li>• Nut filled chocolates</li> <li>• Peanut brittle</li> </ul>
<b>Common Sources of Peanut that should be checked carefully</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muesli and breakfast cereal</li> <li>• Muesli bars and health bars</li> <li>• Energy mixes or trail mix</li> <li>• Fruit crumble mix</li> <li>• Christmas Cakes and puddings</li> <li>• Nougat, fudge and Turkish delight</li> <li>• Pesto</li> <li>• Flavoured cheeses</li> <li>• Vegetarian meals</li> <li>• Asian style meals</li> <li>• Salad dressings</li> <li>• Textured or hydrolysed vegetable protein</li> <li>• Natural flavourings</li> </ul>
<b>Products at high risk of being contaminated with peanuts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chocolate (see information on peanut free chocolate below)</li> <li>• Asian foods</li> <li>• Commercial biscuits and ice creams</li> <li>• Commercial breakfast cereal</li> <li>• Commercial ice creams</li> <li>• Restaurant or takeaway meals</li> </ul>
<b>Non-food sources of peanut</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animal and bird feeds</li> <li>• Cosmetics and massage oils (check for arachnis oil)</li> <li>• Prometrium (progesterone cream derived from peanuts)</li> </ul>

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

<b>Food</b>	<b>Does it need to be avoided?</b>
<b>Peanut and other nut oils</b>	<p>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.</p> <p>It is best to avoid all forms of nut oils if your child have a severe nut allergy.</p>

<b>Coconut and Nutmeg</b>	<b>NO.</b> Coconut comes from the seed of the palm and nutmeg is obtained from the seed of the drupaceous fruit.
<b>Water chestnuts</b>	<b>NO.</b> Despite the name water chestnuts are not a nut and come from the edible portion of a plant root.
<b>Beans, legumes and pulses</b>	<b>NO.</b> Although soy, lentils and peas come from the same family as peanuts, the majority of peanut allergic people can eat these foods safely.
<b>Sesame Seeds</b>	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 ingredient list for any ingredients that may contain peanuts or tree nuts. Since 2002, it has been law that all potential food allergens (peanut, tree nut, seafood, fish, milk, eggs, soybeans and wheat) must 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”

**ALWAYS** check the ingredients list every time you buy the food as the ingredients of the product may change. Be aware that other words may be used for peanut and tree nuts in other countries.

**Peanut** - ground nuts, earth nuts, monkey nuts, beer nut

**Hazelnut** - filbert, cob nut

**Macadamia** - Queensland nut, candle nut (macadamia nut is sometimes substituted for candlenut)

**Pecan** - Hickory nut, Mashuga

### “May contain traces of peanut and tree nut” statements

These statements are used by manufacturers to indicate that the product may be contaminated with peanut or other nuts 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 significant allergic reaction through contamination during processing are extremely unlikely. 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.

## **SOURCES OF CONTAMINATION WITH PEANUT AND TREENUTS**

Casual skin contact with peanut or treenuts is most unlikely to cause a significant reaction

- Children with severe reactions to peanut and other nuts can react as a result of contamination to cooking surfaces and utensils such as knives, kitchen sponges, barbeques and benchtops with peanut and treenuts.
- Margarine and butter containers can also be sources of contamination with nut products, particularly peanut butter.
- 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 peanut or other 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 nuts. 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 nut free food with them to school and should be discouraged from swapping or sharing food. In childcare centres and preschools with very young children where the risk of food contamination of common eating areas or toys is higher, peanuts and particularly peanut butter may be banned. This is a policy that is not considered necessary for older children, although the use of nut containing foods in cooking classes and science experiments is discouraged if there are children with peanut or treenut 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.

## **CHOCOLATE**

Chocolate varieties commonly contain nut and due to manufacturing processes non nut varieties can be contaminated with nut. At the time of writing this information sheet nut free chocolate products that are made in nut free facilities included:

- Sweet William: [www.sweetwilliam.com.au](http://www.sweetwilliam.com.au)
- Kinnerton: [www.kinnerton.com.au](http://www.kinnerton.com.au)

**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](http://www.allergy.org.au)

**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](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

**FSANZ** (Food Standards Australia and New Zealand): for information on food labeling - [www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)