

Many people believe that peanuts and nuts come from the same botanical family. In fact, peanuts are a member of the legume family (peas, beans and lentils). Nuts grow on trees and sometimes are called tree nuts to distinguish them from peanuts. People allergic to peanuts are not necessarily allergic to tree nuts, and vice versa.

Approximately one out of every 150 school age children has a peanut or nut allergy. Both genetics and the environment play a role in the appearance of these allergies. As with other food allergies, the immune system reacts to the proteins in the food as if they were harmful substances, resulting in allergy symptoms.

Peanut allergy is the most common life-threatening food allergy in children. Reactions frequently occur on the first apparent exposure to the food. As little as 1/7,000 to 1/70,000 of a peanut is enough to trigger a reaction in some children. While some children outgrow their peanut allergy, many must avoid all traces of peanuts for life.

As with peanut allergy, a tree nut allergy can be severe and often lifelong. In fact, a person allergic to one tree nut has a 37% chance of being allergic to another tree nut. When children are allergic to one nut, they will need to avoid all other nuts due to the risk of cross-contamination. An allergist is always the best person to assess the seriousness of your child's allergy. The only treatment for these and other food allergies is complete avoidance of foods (and non-food products) that contain the offending proteins. Check the *Read Labels Carefully* section of this pamphlet for more specific information.



## SAFE INTRODUCTION

Doctors and dietitians generally recommend that mothers breast or formula-feed infants without introducing solid foods before the age of six months. While still unproven, many allergists believe that infants can become sensitized to peanut or nut protein through breast milk or even during pregnancy. When there is no family history of peanut allergy, breast-feeding women do not have to avoid peanuts. For women with a family history of peanut or nut allergy or with a strong history of other allergic diseases, it is wise not to eat peanut or nut products during pregnancy and breast-feeding.

The allergy is usually discovered during the first year or two of life, or when peanuts or nuts are eaten for the first time. When there is a family history of peanut or nut allergy, wait until children are at least three to five years old before allowing them to try these foods. While this may not guarantee prevention, it may delay the onset of allergies.

## MANAGING RISKS OUTSIDE THE HOME

Reactions to peanuts or nuts can occur anywhere food is eaten. Mealtime can be a concern for peanut and nut allergic children and their parents. To make meals and snacks safe and enjoyable in schools and day cares, FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES:

**Teach an allergic child not to share foods.**

- Increase supervision during meals and snacks (organize allergy-free tables or sections).
- Never share food/drinks, utensils and containers.
- Thoroughly clean surfaces like tables and toys to eliminate all residue (especially with peanut butter, which is more sticky).
- Allergic children should avoid school activities involving peanuts, e.g., crafts or activities using birdseed or peanut shells, play dough contaminated with peanut butter.
- Children and adults should wash hands before and after eating and after handling food or eating food.
- Allergic children should bring their own food for special occasions like birthday parties or Halloween and have some non-perishable nut-free treats left at school for other special events.
- Foods brought to school from home or elsewhere should have ingredient labels.
- Be careful when dining out. Always ask about the ingredients used in the preparation of food when unsure.
- Instruct all staff on the importance of careful label reading and cross-contamination (foods that may have come in contact with peanut — or nut — containing products).
- Train school staff to administer epinephrine.
- Ensure that an emergency plan is in place.

## READ LABELS CAREFULLY!

To avoid foods containing peanuts or nuts, read labels on packaged, prepared foods carefully. DO NOT purchase or eat food that does not carry a list of ingredients. Read labels each time you buy the product. Ingredients do change so you may want to take this list along next time you go grocery shopping.

## AVOIDING PEANUTS

### Foods that contain peanuts

- Arachide
- Beer nut
- Cacahouète/cacahouette/cacahuète
- Ground nuts
- Mandelonas (artificial nuts made from peanuts)
- Mixed nuts with peanuts
- Peanuts
- Peanut butter
- Peanut flour
- Peanut meal
- Peanut—or arachis—oil (cold pressed)
- Peanut punch/drink
- Peanut sauce
- Peanut soup
- Szechuan sauce
- Valencias

### Foods that may contain peanuts

- Almond paste
- Baked goods (cakes, etc.)
- Cake icing
- Candy
- Chili con carne
- Chinese foods
- Chocolate bars
- Commercial desserts
- Cookies
- Doughnuts
- Dried salad dressings
- Egg roll/Imperial roll
- European baby formula (some)
- Fried foods
- Fried snack foods
- Granola or fruit bars
- Hydrolyzed vegetable/plant protein (although peanut is rarely used in Canada)
- Macaroons
- Nougat
- Pastries
- Peanut popcorn
- Potato chips (peanut oil)
- Prepared, dehydrated soups
- Satay sauce
- Thai food
- Vegetarian burgers

**Reminder:** Always ask what ingredients were used in the preparation of foods; peanuts are sometimes used where you would least expect to find them.

### Some non-food sources of peanuts

- Bird feed/pet food
- Craft materials
- Lip glosses
- Mushroom — growing medium
- Skin creams
- Stuffing in toys
- Sunscreen/Suntan lotion (some)
- Vitamins (some)



## AVOIDING NUTS

### Ingredients that indicate the presence of nuts

- Almonds
- Beechnuts
- Brazil nuts
- Butternuts
- Cashews
- Chestnuts
- Filberts
- Hazelnuts
- Hickory nuts
- Macadamias
- Mixed nuts
- Nuts
- Nut butter
- Nut oil (cold pressed)
- Pecans
- Pine nuts (pignoli)
- Pistachios
- Pralines
- Walnuts

### Foods that contain or may contain nuts

- Almond paste
- Cakes
- Candy
- Cheese spreads
- Chinese foods
- Chocolate bars
- Cookies
- Granola bars
- Ice cream
- Marzipan
- Muesli
- Muffins
- Nougat
- Nutella
- Nut-flavoured liqueurs (e.g. Amaretto, Frangelico)
- Pesto sauce
- Pure almond extract
- Speciality coffees
- Sweet rolls
- Trail mix
- Trout amandine

### Some non-food sources of nuts

- Bath oil
- Cosmetic face or body creams (some now contain unrefined nut oils)
- Shampoo
- Sunscreen/Suntan lotion

## FOOD LABELLING IN CANADA

When reading a food label:

1. Check the list of ingredients for mention of the allergen.
2. If the statement “may contain traces of peanuts or nuts...” is at the end of the list of ingredients, it means that eating the product is a risk because it may have come in contact with peanuts or nuts.
3. The statement “does not contain any trace of peanuts or nuts...” means that the manufacturer believes that the product is free of the allergen.

Canadian labelling laws are currently under review. Some of the proposed changes would require that:

- The major allergenic foods, which include peanuts and nuts, must always be specifically named when they are added to foods as ingredients or components (ingredients of ingredients), no matter how small the quantity.
- The plant species must be identified in the common names of hydrolyzed proteins added to a food. For example, hydrolyzed plant proteins, if made from peanut, would have to be called “hydrolyzed peanut protein” in the list of ingredients.

**NOTE:** Be wary of imported chocolates from unfamiliar manufacturers. Sometimes chocolates from other countries are made using a small percentage of leftover chocolate that may contain traces of nuts or peanuts. Also, in general, cookies, cakes, chocolate and other products made by large companies are probably safer than those made by small companies with many products produced on the same production line.



## FACTS ABOUT PEANUT/NUT ALLERGY

### Cause

An abnormal reaction of the immune system to the peanut or nut protein.

### Age of onset

Usually occurs during the first year or two of life, or whenever peanuts or nuts are first eaten.

### Diagnosis

Should be made by a doctor or an allergist who may use several tools, including:

- Detailed history
- Food challenge
- Skin prick test
- Blood tests

### Symptoms

Reactions to a food typically begin within minutes but may also occur (or reoccur) up to two to four hours after eating and usually last less than one day.

**Allergic reactions to food can include any of the following symptoms:**

### Digestion

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Tingling in the mouth
- Abdominal pain
- Diarrhea

### Skin

- Rash
- Itching
- Hives
- Redness
- Eczema
- Swelling
- Change in skin colour

### Air Passages

- Runny nose, sneezing
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Coughing, choking, gagging
- Nasal congestion
- Difficulty breathing
- Wheezing



### Anaphylaxis

Most peanut/nut allergies are considered potentially anaphylactic. Even a mild peanut/nut allergy can cause anaphylaxis if enough is eaten. Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that involves several parts of the body. It can lead to loss of consciousness and death. **Immediate medical help is necessary. Those at risk should carry epinephrine and wear a "MedicAlert®" bracelet.**

### Treatment

- Be prepared. Carry injectable epinephrine (e.g. EpiPen®) if prescribed and know how to use it. Go to a hospital emergency room for follow-up.
- Even very small amounts of peanuts or nuts can cause serious reactions. Complete avoidance of peanuts or nuts, including any food or other product containing peanuts or nuts, is necessary.
- Reading food labels for all foods is the key to maintaining control over the allergy. If the product does not have a label, the food should not be eaten.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Can a peanut allergy be outgrown?

Peanut allergy was once considered to be life long. Today, studies indicate that around 20% of children diagnosed with a peanut allergy can outgrow it. To be safe, never re-introduce peanut products in your child's diet without the approval of your allergist.

### Can a person react to the smell of peanuts?

The smell of a food can cause an allergic reaction but it is not usually severe unless there is an extremely high concentration of that food (e.g. released from deep fried cooking, or if the person is already having an asthma attack at that time, or has poorly controlled asthma). The smell usually causes only minor symptoms like itchy eyes or runny nose when near an open jar of peanut butter, or when near people eating peanuts on an airplane.

### Is peanut/nut oil safe for my child?

Pure refined peanut/nut oil, if properly processed, should not contain peanut/nut protein and therefore should not cause reactions in allergic children. However, peanut/nut oils are also available unrefined. Unrefined oils may be called cold-pressed, unprocessed, expelled or extruded oils. These unrefined oils may have peanut/nut proteins and could cause allergic reactions.

### Is coconut a nut?

No, coconut is not a nut and therefore it does not have to be avoided by nut allergic people. Only those allergic to coconut need to avoid products containing coconut.

### If I am allergic to nuts, can I eat seeds?

Seeds, such as sesame, sunflower, poppy, mustard, safflower and canola, do not need to be avoided unless you are allergic to them.

### What about hydrolyzed vegetable protein?

Hydrolyzed vegetable protein or hydrolyzed plant protein is usually made from soy, wheat or corn. It is rare to find hydrolyzed vegetable protein made from peanuts in Canadian products. Under the current regulations, if it is made from peanuts, it does not have to say so on the food label but this is about to be changed. Canadian labelling is currently under review. Refer to the above section on *Food Labelling in Canada*.

### What is cross-contamination and how can it affect my child?

Cross-contamination occurs when a safe food comes in contact with a food allergen such as peanuts or nuts. In industry, cross-contamination may occur when more than one product is made on the same processing or packaging line or when equipment used to manufacture one product containing peanuts or nuts is used to manufacture other foods. At home or in school, children should be wary of jam or butter, which could be contaminated by using the same knife used to spread peanut butter, cookies from a cookie jar that was not washed between batches, doughnuts and bulk foods that may have been transferred into a bin containing peanut products. Children should always bring their own lunch and not share foods.



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# Peanut and Nut Allergies

## The Facts

