



## **Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis A Fact Sheet for Emergency Responders**

The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) is a national nonprofit organization established to increase public awareness about food allergy and anaphylaxis, to provide education, and to advance research on behalf of all those affected by food allergies. For more information call FAAN at 1-800-929-4040 or visit the website at [www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org).

- Between 6 and 7 million Americans, or 2 to 2.5 percent of the general population, suffer from food allergy.
- Eight foods account for 90 percent of the allergic reactions: peanuts, tree nuts (walnuts, pecans, etc.), fish, shellfish, eggs, milk, soy, and wheat. Peanuts are the leading cause of severe allergic reactions, followed by shellfish, fish, tree nuts, and eggs.
- Individuals with food allergies and asthma appear to be at an increased risk for severe allergic reactions.
- Food allergy is the leading cause of anaphylaxis outside the hospital setting, accounting for an estimated 30,000 ER visits.
- It is estimated that as many as 100 to 200 people die each year from food allergic reactions, approximately 50 people die from insect sting reactions.

### **What happens in the body during a food-allergic reaction?**

The immune system mistakenly believes that a harmless substance, in this case a food item, is harmful. In its attempt to protect the body, it creates specific IgE antibodies to that food. The next time the individual eats that food, the immune system releases massive amounts of chemicals and histamines in order to protect the body. These chemicals trigger a cascade of allergic symptoms that can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin, or cardiovascular system.

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## **What are the common symptoms of a reaction?**

Symptoms range from mild to severe. The severe or life threatening reactions are called anaphylaxis. Symptoms can include tingling sensation in the mouth, swelling of the tongue and the throat, difficulty breathing, hives, vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, drop in blood pressure, and loss of consciousness. In rare cases, death occurs. Symptoms typically appear within minutes to two hours after the person has eaten the food to which he or she is allergic.

## **What is the best treatment for food allergy?**

Strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food is the only way to avoid a reaction. Reading ingredient labels for all foods is the key to maintaining control over the allergy. If a product doesn't have a label, allergic individuals should not eat that food. If the label contains unfamiliar terms, shoppers must call the manufacturer and ask for a definition or avoid eating that food.

## **What is the best treatment for a food allergy reaction?**

Epinephrine, also called adrenaline, is the medication of choice for controlling a severe allergic reaction. It is available as an auto injector by prescription as EpiPen® or EpiPen® Jr.

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