



The Nine Foods that Cause More Than 90% of Food Allergies

Experts have identified more than 170 foods that cause allergic reactions. But nine foods have been linked to more than 90% of food-causing reactions. The symptoms can range from mild to severe and even potentially life-threatening. To help people easily identify these foods, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires food manufacturers to identify these ingredients on their labels. These may be highlighted within the ingredients list or in a separate “contains” statement near the list. Here is a list of these foods and the surprising places you might find them.

1. Milk

A milk allergy requires avoidance of milk and milk products that come from a cow. This includes butter, cheese, ice cream, and yogurt. Depending on the severity of the allergy, some people may be able to tolerate baked milk products like in a baked good. More sensitive allergies may react to milk from other mammals like goats, sheep, and buffalo.

2. Eggs

Like a milk allergy, some people may be able to eat baked or cooked eggs. Eggs can be cooked in different forms (scrambled, hard boiled, fried, poached) and are often added to recipes with casseroles, baked goods, and meatloaves. They often hide in foods like pastas and marshmallows and in condiments like hollandaise, mayonnaise, and salad dressings.

3. Peanuts

Peanuts are one of the most common food allergies. You can find peanuts on their own or blended to make peanut butter. They also hide in unexpected foods. Fried foods may have been made with peanut oil, which can cause a reaction in a sensitive allergy.

4. Tree nuts

Tree nuts include walnuts, hazelnuts, almonds, pecans, cashews, and pistachios. While these may be easily recognizable in some dishes, tree nuts hide in unusual places too, like some BBQ sauces.

5. Shellfish

A shellfish allergy is an allergy to a specific type of marine animal that has a shell. This group is divided into crustaceans or mollusks. The FDA recognizes crustacean shellfish as a major allergen. This group includes shrimp, crab, lobster, and crayfish. Many health-care providers suggest avoiding all shellfish including clams, oysters, scallops, snails, and octopus. Typically, this allergy is revealed later in life with a more adventurous diet.

6. Fish

While fish and shellfish live in similar environments, being allergic to one does not make you allergic to the other. Fish includes finned fish, such as tuna, salmon, and cod. But there are many more that fall into this category. Keep an eye out for unexpected sources of fish including Worcestershire sauce and some Caesar salad dressings.

7. Wheat

A wheat allergy is different from gluten intolerance and celiac disease, but avoiding wheat is a treatment for each. A gluten allergy might require avoidance of other grains, too. To manage a wheat allergy, you must avoid wheat in all forms including flour. Surprising sources of wheat may include baked goods, fried foods, sauces and condiments, and processed meats like sausage. Some brands of playdough contain wheat and people with that allergy should avoid it.

8. Soybean

Soybeans are a member of the legume family with beans, peas, and lentils. An allergy to soy does not mean an allergy to other legumes. Soy is used in the processing of many foods. Sources of soy may include sauces, canned foods, baked goods, and convenience foods like bars and snacks. People with this allergy should avoid soy products like soy milk and yogurt.

9. Sesame

Sesame is the most recent addition to this list. As of January 2023, the FDA recognizes it as the ninth major allergen. You should avoid sesame products with this allergy. This may include baked goods, sauces, cereals and granolas, chips, and crackers.

To stay safe with a food allergy, check food labels to identify if the food was used in a product. When eating outside of your home, ask questions about how a food was prepared.

Reference

Cleveland Clinic. (2023). Warning Label: The Most Common Food Allergens. Retrieved from <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/most-common-food-allergies>

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