Grains they're essential!

Les produits céréaliers, essentiels pour la santé !

Food Allergies—Questions and Answers

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is when the immune system has an unusual reaction to the protein in a food. A very small amount of the food can cause the allergic reaction. The allergy-causing food is called an allergen.

Allergies tend to run in families. While there is much public concern about food allergies, in actual fact, true food allergies are uncommon. Food allergies occur in about 6% of children and in 3-4% of adults. Many children outgrow allergies such as those to milk and eggs. Other food allergies remain for life such as allergies to peanut or shellfish. A diagnosis of food allergy is made by a qualified medical professional.

Symptoms of food allergies vary with the individual and can affect different parts of the body. Examples of symptoms are rashes or hives, nausea, diarrhea, and breathing difficulties. In rare cases, a severe, life-threatening reaction called anaphylaxis can occur.

The most common food allergies are:

- Milk
- Eggs
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts (Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, almonds, walnuts, pecans)
- Fish
- Shellfish (mussels, crab, shrimp)
- Soy
- Wheat

What is food intolerance?

Food intolerance differs from an allergy as it does not involve the immune system. A normal portion or more of food is usually needed to cause a reaction and is a result of not being able to digest or absorb the food properly. A common example would be lactose intolerance—the inability to digest the sugar found in milk.

What are some of the most common food allergies?

Milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy and wheat are common food allergies. These foods are also ingredients in many foods including breads and baked goods.

If I have food allergies, can I still eat baked goods?

Yes you can. Many baked goods are available without nuts, peanuts, eggs and milk. Other liquids can replace milk and products can be made egg free. There are commercial egg substitutes available for purchase. However, products such as liquid eggs do contain eggs or egg whites and should be avoided.

If you have food allergies, it is important to read labels and know what you are eating:

1. Check the list of ingredients for the allergy-causing food or ingredients made from the allergen. For example, ammonium caseinate or lactoalbumin are proteins from milk used as ingredients. For a complete list of foods that may contain peanuts, nuts, milk or eggs visit the Allergy and Asthma Information Association at www.aaia.ca or call their national number (1-800-611-7011).
2. Many bakeries and packaged baked goods identify products that are free of allergens, such as "this product does not contain any traces of peanut or nuts". Many products will state "may contain nuts" if there is risk of cross-contamination. This can occur if nuts are used in other products made in the same facility but not necessarily in the product you are interested in purchasing. If unsure, ask the baker.

For more information contact: Baking Association of Canada
7895 Tranmere Dr, Ste 202 Mississauga, ON L5S 1V9 Tel: 905-405-0288, Toll Free in Canada & USA 1-888-674-BAKE (2253)
Fax: 905-405-0993 E-Mail: info@baking.ca
May be reproduced without permission provided no changes are made and credit is given. Printed April 2010.
Visit www.GrainsEssential.ca to download PDFs of this resource.