

# Frequently Asked Questions about Peanut and Tree Nut Allergies

Why are peanut and tree nut allergies so serious? There are approximately 12 million Americans with food allergies. The eight major food allergens are milk, eggs, soy, wheat, fish, shellfish, peanuts and tree nuts. Of these, peanut and tree nut allergies are somewhat unique in that whole body (or systemic) reactions can occur from exposure to as little as 1/10 of a peanut and reactions can occur from the residue and dust of both tree nuts and peanuts. Peanut and tree nuts account for 92% of severe and fatal reactions and are generally considered to be lifelong allergies.

What are the symptoms and treatment for an anaphylactic reaction? Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction occurring within the whole body. Symptoms may be fatal if not treated quickly with epinephrine. Common symptoms range from a tingling sensation in the mouth, swelling of the tongue and throat, difficulty breathing, drop in blood pressure, abdominal cramps and loss of consciousness to death. Symptoms typically appear within minutes to two hours after the person has been exposed and immediate medical attention is needed when anaphylaxis occurs. Emergency treatment includes an injection of epinephrine to open up the airway and blood vessels.

What can I do to provide a safe environment for all students? Try not to send peanut/nut products to school, but if you do remind your child to sit at the nut end of the table and to wash their hands. If your child eats a peanut/nut product for breakfast have them wash their hands and face prior to leaving home. Have your child wash their hands prior to reading library books and do not store them near nut/peanut products. Do not send in party food that contains nut/peanut products.

What is the difference between a peanut and a tree nut? A peanut is a vegetable from the legume family (which includes peas, soybeans, and lentils). A tree nut is a fruit and is typically hard, dry, closed one-seeded fruit. Some examples of a tree nut include walnuts, almonds, cashews, pecans, and pistachios.

Can people with a peanut allergy eat tree nuts? Although peanuts and tree nuts are not biologically related, there seems to be a high level of allergic cross-reactivity between peanuts and tree nuts, and anyone with a peanut allergy is advised to avoid tree nuts (and vice versa).

What about coconut and nutmeg – are they nuts? Although coconut is the seed of a fruit, it is generally not restricted from the diet of tree-nut allergic people. Nutmeg and water chestnuts are not nuts and do not need to be avoided by tree-nut-allergic people.

What foods commonly contain peanuts and/or tree nuts? Aside from the obvious foods (peanut butter and trail mix), peanuts and tree nuts are commonly found in granola bars, baked goods, cereal, chocolate candies, packaged goods and many ethnic sauces. Also, many brands of sunflower seeds are produced on equipment shared with peanuts. Tree nuts have been found in ice cream, yogurt, candies, cookies, breads, muffins, baked goods, sauces, salad dressings and crushed and added to pie crust to add flavor and crunch. Peanuts and peanut butter have been used to thicken chili sauce, brown gravy, and spaghetti sauce, egg rolls, in hot chocolate and in flavorings in candy and gourmet popcorn.

What about granola bars? According to the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network these products are often manufactured using the same equipment as products containing peanut/nut products, which could possibly cause the bars to contain trace peanut or tree nut protein. We consider all granola bars to have nut/peanut product so your child will be asked to wash their hands prior to going out to recess as well as sitting at the nut end of the table for lunch. Please read ingredient labels very carefully as these items frequently contain nuts. **If your child is in a nut free classroom please do not send in granola bars.** If a granola bar is sent in the teacher will send it home and provide an alternative snack.

What should I look for in the ingredients list? Artificial nuts, beer nuts, cold pressed, expelled or extruded peanut oil, goobers, ground nuts, monkey nuts, nutmeat, nut pieces, peanut, peanut butter, peanut flower, almond, brazil nuts, caponata, cashews, chestnuts, filberts/hazelnuts, gianduja, hickory nuts, macadamia nuts, mandelonas, marzipan/almond paste, nougat, nut butter, nut paste, pecans, pesto, pine nuts (pignoli) pistachios, praline, walnuts, mortadella

What can you suggest for safe snacks and lunches? Snacks such as fresh fruit (bananas, apples, clementines), applesauce, veggies with dip, string cheese, pudding cups and chips are generally safe and easy to pack. For lunch, don't forget the benefits of a thermos. You can keep food warm or cold, and you'd be surprised at what you can come up with. For specific examples, check out the following website:

<http://www.foodallergy.org/school/lunch.html>

Where can I learn more about food allergies? The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network has an informative website at: [www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org). You can also read several articles by going to the [www.about.com](http://www.about.com) website and searching on food allergies. There is also an informative book by Michael Young, M.D. entitled 'The Peanut Allergy Answer Book', available in most bookstores and libraries.