

Food Allergens (SS)

Why this is important

Some of our customers react to allergens in certain foods and food products. You should know the signs of an allergic reaction and answers to common questions about allergens in foods.

Definition: allergen

An *allergen* is a substance that causes an inflammatory reaction in various parts of the body.

Types of allergens

The eight main types of food allergens are

- peanuts
- tree nuts (walnuts, pecans, and almonds)
- milk
- eggs
- fish
- shellfish (shrimp, crayfish, lobster, and crab)
- soy and
- wheat.

Other allergen concerns include

- sesame seeds
 - sulfites and
 - monosodium glutamate (MSG).
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Rules for food allergens

Follow these rules when working with foods that can cause an allergic reaction.

Always

- keep foods with allergens stored separately from non-allergen foods if possible.
 - prevent cross-contamination. Keep utensils used with products known to have allergens separate from other utensils, and use them only for that task.
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Food Allergens (SS), Continued

Common reactions Allergic reactions may take several forms, depending on what part of the body is affected, but all reactions involve the immune system. The most common reactions to a food allergen are swelling of the eyes and throat, and rashes. However, some reactions can be fatal.

Food allergen statement sign Each department has a food allergen statement label or food advisory warning sign that must be displayed and visible to customers when facing the department. The sign must notify customers of any potential food allergens or allergen concerns that may be present in the department. Contact Printing Services if your department doesn't have a sign.

Food allergen statement label Allergen statement labels must be placed on products that don't already have a statement on them. This includes products that were

- packaged and broken at the customer's request or based on business needs
- repackaged in the store or
- opened and rewrapped, such as Deli meats.

In addition to the allergen statement and information, the label must accurately reflect

- ingredients using common names to ensure customers are aware of choking hazards and potential allergens and
- the original expiration date.

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Food Allergens (SS), Continued

Product labeling

Product labels are an important reference for customers with food allergens. They provide product information to the customer and include an ingredient list. Customers with allergens may use this information to determine if the product is safe to eat based on their allergen restrictions. All ready-to-cook products and products prepared in the store require labels. If the product is merchandised so the customer can retrieve it without interacting with an associate, then it must have an ingredient label.

Products that are served to customers by an associate don't require an ingredient label. Customers are instead able to get ingredient information from the associate serving the product.

Frequently asked questions

This table lists frequently asked questions about food allergens.

Question	Answer
What's a food allergy?	It's an immune system response to a food that the body mistakenly believes is harmful, and creates antibodies to that food.
What are the most common foods that cause allergic reactions?	The eight most common foods that account for 90 percent of all allergic reactions are peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, eggs, milk, soy, and wheat.
What are the typical symptoms of an allergic reaction?	Symptoms range from a tingling sensation in the mouth, swelling of the tongue and throat, difficulty breathing, hives, vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness, to death.
What's the difference between a food intolerance and a food allergy?	A food intolerance (such as lactose intolerance) is an adverse reaction caused by a food that doesn't involve the immune system. A food allergy occurs when the immune system reacts to a certain food by creating antibodies to that food.
What's the best way to treat a food allergy?	Strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food is the only way to avoid a reaction. Reading ingredient labels is key to maintaining control over the allergy. If a product doesn't have a label, allergic individuals shouldn't eat the food. If the label contains unfamiliar terms, customers should either avoid eating the food or call the manufacturer and ask for a definition of the unfamiliar terms.
What is anaphylaxis?	Anaphylaxis is a serious allergic reaction that has a rapid onset and may cause death. Common causes include insect bites or stings, foods, and medications. Anyone experiencing anaphylaxis should seek immediate medical attention.

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