

Food Allergies, or Just Food Fussiness?

Jenny's enjoyed her morning snack. But 30 minutes later, she's cranky. Her eyes look swollen, and she's crying. Does Jenny have a food allergy, or is she just being funny?

Food allergies are ...

A reaction to food that isn't normal. The body's immune system gets confused. Within minutes (or in up to 2 hours) it triggers symptoms that may seem like an illness:

- Sneezing, runny nose, coughing, difficult breathing, wheezing (asthma)
- Itchy skin or eyes, rash, swelling
- Nausea, diarrhea, gas, pain, cramps

Most allergic reactions are just uncomfortable. But a small percentage of people have severe reactions that can threaten their lives. Symptoms that seem like allergies may be other serious health problems, too. Find out!

If you suspect a food allergy:

Have your child checked by your health care provider. That's the only way to know if your child really has a food allergy. If so, being under a doctor's care is essential!

Skip any urge to diagnose an allergy yourself. If you take away a food, such as milk, your child might miss nutrients needed to grow and stay healthy.

Common Food Allergies

For children: peanuts, milk, eggs, tree nuts (such as pecans, almonds, cashews, walnuts), soy, and wheat

For adults: peanuts, tree nuts, fish, and shellfish (especially shrimp)



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About one out of 20 children is allergic to at least one food. There's good news! Except for peanuts and tree nuts, most children outgrow food allergies. Until then, here's what you can do:



Help Your Child Handle a Food Allergy and Eat Healthfully

- **Get Help.** You can't be an instant expert. Your health care provider can help.
- **Avoid offering problem foods!** Be aware: foods that cause allergies can be ingredients in mixed foods.
- **Find out about food substitutes.** You need to know other foods with the nutrients your child would miss. Try to create dishes your whole family can enjoy.
- **Read the ingredient list on food labels.** That's how to tell if a packaged food has the problem ingredient.
- **Tell all caregivers.** Bring a note from your child's health care provider to the day care center. Tell babysitters, grandparents, other relatives and friends! Explain what foods to avoid, and why.
- **Order carefully for your child when you eat out.** Ask about the ingredients.
- **Take food from home.** If you're not sure about food at day care, restaurant, or someone's home, pack food for your child.
- **Role-play with your child.** Practice what to do when someone who doesn't know about the food allergy offers food.