

Food Allergies

Certain foods cause an allergic reaction in some people. The reaction may include an itchy rash, an upset stomach, a runny nose and sneezing, an itchy throat, a wheezing asthma attack, or a sudden drop in blood pressure causing dizziness or even fainting. Certain foods also cause some people to suffer recurrent migraine headaches, although strictly speaking this is not due to an allergic immune reaction. For people who are severely allergic to a certain food, the reaction can be life threatening.

Allergic reactions may appear within minutes or be delayed for several hours. The severity of the reaction is affected by the amount of food eaten, the way it was cooked, and the number of allergic foods eaten together. Additionally, these factors affect the type and duration of the allergic symptoms. In extremely allergic people, even steam from cooking food can cause a reaction if they are allergic to that food. Also, the active presence of other allergens, such as pollen, can make a food allergy more noticeable.

Food allergies are more common in children than adults. (Adults, actually, are 100 times more likely to be allergic to medications than to food.) For children, some common food allergens include milk, eggs, wheat and beans. For adults, common causes include nuts, fish and shellfish, and certain fruits. Some people are allergic to whole families of related foods, such as peanuts, peas, beans, soy, and licorice.

Allergic reactions can also be caused by food additives. Some dyes, preservatives, and other additives in colored beverages, foods, and even mouthwashes can cause skin rashes or wheezing. Sulfites, which are used to reduce discoloration and spoilage, can also cause allergic reactions, especially in people with asthma.

To best deal with your food allergies, first find out what causes the reaction. Keep a diary of everything that you eat, drink, or otherwise passes through your lips. Take careful notice of what you wrote down during the three hours before a reaction. Once you've identified the guilty food, stop eating it. If that's not practical, or if you've eaten it by mistake, you may relieve mild symptoms by taking a nonprescription antihistamine such as Chlor-trimeton or Benadryl. If the food is one that you eat frequently and the reaction is not severe, do not eat or drink it more than once or twice a week. You may find that your symptoms improve and you can still eat the food in moderation.

If you have signs of a severe allergic reaction, go to the Emergency Room immediately. Such severe symptoms include trouble breathing, weakness, chest pains, or fainting. If your symptoms are less severe but are not relieved by nonprescription drugs, you should call your medical professional. He or she may prescribe a stronger medication or refer you to the Allergy Department for further evaluation. If you're referred, you'll receive a detailed questionnaire and possibly some skin or blood tests to help determine what causes your allergic reactions. Severe allergic reactions are dangerous, and any known allergen should be completely avoided.

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For more health information ...

- Connect to our Web site at *members.kp.org*
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.

Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand names; any similar products may be used.

If you have an emergency medical condition, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital. When you have an emergency medical condition, we cover emergency care from Plan providers and non-Plan providers anywhere in the world.

An emergency medical condition is (1) a medical or psychiatric condition that manifests itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that you could reasonably expect the absence of immediate medical attention to result in serious jeopardy to your health or serious impairment or dysfunction of your bodily functions or organs; or, (2) when you are in active labor and there isn't enough time for safe transfer to a Plan hospital before delivery, or if transfer poses a threat to your or your unborn child's health and safety.