

Living with nut allergy

Nutrition & Dietetics Department

This booklet gives information on the diagnosis and treatment of nut allergy. It is designed for people of all ages with nut allergy, their families and carers.

As with other allergic conditions, nut allergy has been increasing in frequency. It is now a common condition affecting between 1 in 50 and 1 in 100 children.

Allergy to nuts can start at any age but most often between 14 months and 2 years. Only 1 in 5 children will grow out of it.

In very rare cases, very small amounts of nuts can bring on a reaction, including just touching nuts or inhaling nut dust. However, sensitivity does vary considerably.

Never reintroduce nuts without medical guidance or supervision.

Peanuts grow under the ground and are in a different family (called legumes) to tree nuts (such as almonds, brazils, hazelnuts and walnuts).

Some people react to both peanuts and tree nuts. It is often best, particularly in young children, to avoid all nuts.

What is the test for nut allergy?

Your doctor can test you for nut allergy by a skin prick test or a blood test. Very occasionally people are given a nut challenge where they are gradually exposed to nuts. This is generally done in hospital.

What are the symptoms of nut allergy?

Reactions to nuts vary from mild to severe. They can start very quickly and may be life threatening.

Mild-moderate reaction:

- Swollen lips, face or eyes
- Itchy/tingling mouth
- Hives or itchy skin rash
- Abdominal pain or vomiting
- Sudden change in behaviour
- Dry repetitive coughing

Severe or anaphylactic reaction: the above symptoms plus:

Airway: Persistent cough, hoarse voice, difficulty swallowing, swollen tongue.

Breathing: Difficult or noisy breathing, wheeze or persistent cough.

Consciousness: Persistent dizziness/pale or floppy suddenly sleepy, collapse, unconscious. You are more likely to have a severe reaction if you have asthma.

What should I do in the event of a reaction?

Accidental exposure to nuts is common – **always carry your emergency treatment with you**. If your child is nut-allergic ensure all carers (including school and babysitters) are aware of this. A management plan may be provided, which you can carry with you. Consider joining the MedicAlert scheme – where you wear a bracelet or a necklace alerting any doctor to your allergy.

Mild reaction: Take an antihistamine e.g. Piriton® or cetirizine. This may take 15-30 minutes to start working. If the reaction gets worse use your adrenaline injector and seek medical help.

Severe reaction: If you have an adrenaline injector (Epipen®, or Jext®) use it immediately and call an ambulance. Even if you feel better, it is important to seek medical attention as the adrenaline can wear off. Take an antihistamine if you are able to. If you are wheezy and have a salbutamol/Ventolin® inhaler, then use it. If prescribed, please take your steroid medication.

What types of nuts should I avoid if I have nut allergy?

At present we recommend that people with nut allergy avoid all tree nuts and peanuts unless they are advised otherwise by their doctor.

By tree nuts we mean: almonds, beech nuts, brazil nuts, cashew nuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts (cobnuts& filberts are types of hazelnut), macadamia nuts (queensland nut, candle nut & bush nut are types of macadamia nut), pecans (hickory nuts are a type of pecan), pistachio nuts, walnuts.

Peanuts may also be called: earthnuts, groundnuts, goober nuts or peas, mandalona nuts, monkey nuts, beer nuts, cacahuete nuts, chinese nuts.

Arachis hypogaea is the Latin name for peanuts and Arachis oil is peanut oil.

How can I avoid nuts?

You should avoid eating nuts and any food or drink containing nuts unless your doctor has told you otherwise. This is for the following reasons:

- Multiple nut allergies – some people may react to more than one type of nut. Some people may react to both peanuts and tree nuts
- Different types of nuts may be processed in the same factory and one type of nut may be contaminated with another type
- Sometimes peanuts are processed to look and taste like other nuts

Preventing reactions happening is a key part of living with nut allergy – you should be able to recognise and avoid food containing nuts.

Always read food labels carefully.

Which foods contain nuts?

The following list indicates what types of food may contain nuts. *This list is not exhaustive.* Always check food labels or recipes to make sure the food is nut-free before eating.

Breakfast cereals	e.g. Crunchy Nut Cornflakes®, Fruit and Fibre®, Harvest Crunch®, muesli, granola, Krave®
Spreads	e.g. peanut butter, other nut butter, Nutella® & chocolate spreads
Biscuits & cakes	e.g. cookies, brownies, cakes & gateaux with nut toppings, amaretto products, marzipan, Bakewell tarts, Christmas cake, Dundee cake, date and walnut loaf, macaroons, frangipane, cereal bars, muesli biscuits
Sweets & chocolate	e.g. Picnic®, Snickers®, Lion Bar®, Topic®, nougat, praline, M&Ms®, chocolate brazils
Dairy products	e.g. Nut flavoured milkshakes, yoghurts containing nuts, ice cream containing nuts
Desserts	e.g. Chocolate nut sundaes, pecan pies, Danish pastries, desserts with biscuit bases, Christmas pudding
Vegetarian foods	e.g. Nut roasts, nuts burgers, nut pate, some vegetarian sausages & burgers, some vegetable bakes
Salads and salad dressings	e.g. Unrefined nut oil in a salad dressing, Waldorf salad
Savoury snacks	e.g. Bombay mix, trail mix
Miscellaneous	e.g. Stuffing mix, Marron (chestnut puree) in a sauce
Ethnic meals	e.g. Chinese, Indian, Indonesian, Malaysian and Thai food

How do I check if a food contains nuts?

Always check the food label. Nuts must be labelled by law on all foods manufactured in the European Union. Food labels can be very useful in checking whether a food contains peanuts or tree nuts. *Ingredients and recipes do change so check food labels regularly.*

The allergy information for all food sold loose or unwrapped such as food from salad bars or bakeries must now be available on request. In these areas, foods may be contaminated with nuts. It is wise to avoid food sold from these areas.

Most supermarkets provide lists of their products which are nut-free. These can be obtained by contacting the supermarkets head office. Always make sure the list you are using is up to date.

What about foods labelled as ‘may contain traces of nuts’?

Many foods are labelled ‘may contain nuts’ when they are processed in a factory where nuts are used. These can be difficult to avoid. Please ask your doctor whether these may be eaten in your case.

What about peanut or nut oil?

Peanut oil is also known as Arachis oil or groundnut oil. Peanut oil and nut oils such as walnut oil come as refined or unrefined. There are a number of medications which contain peanut oil. Please discuss this with your allergy doctor.

Refined peanut oil is usually tolerated in people with peanut allergy. Food manufacturers generally use refined oil within products.

Unrefined or ‘**crude**’ oils may contain small amounts of nut protein so may cause a reaction. Unrefined oils should always be avoided. Unrefined nut oils may be used in salad dressings and shop-bought salads.

Can I eat chocolate?

Chocolate is made from the cocoa bean. This is not related to peanut or nuts. However nuts are often used with chocolate so you need to check that the chocolate you eat is nut free. There are a few manufacturers which have nut-free factories and are able to guarantee that the products are nut free. One example is Kinnerton Confectionery www.kinnerton.com.

What about coconut and nutmeg?

These are not related to peanut or tree nuts so most people with nut allergy can eat them. Please ask your doctor about your case.

Can I eat seeds?

Some people with nut allergy are also allergic to sesame seeds and more rarely poppy and sunflower seeds. If you have eaten these since your reaction to nuts without any problem, then you can continue. If not, you need to discuss this with your doctor.

Can I eat pine nuts?

Yes. Pine nuts are classified as a seed.

What about essence of nuts?

There have not been any cases of reactions to essence of nuts such as almond essence however you are recommended to avoid them.

Can I eat legumes?

People who are allergic to peanuts occasionally react to other legumes such as beans, chick peas, lentils, peas and soya beans. Lupin seeds and lupin flour can also be problematic in some people with peanut allergy. Lupin flour is used more in Europe. Please discuss this with your doctor.

Should I inform my child's school?

You must always tell your child's nursery, school or college about their nut allergy. Many schools and nurseries have policies about the food allowed in school and emergency medical treatment.

What about takeaway foods and eating in restaurants?

Most reactions to nuts happen when food is eaten away from home.

Always carry your emergency treatment if you are going to eat away from home.

- Avoid Chinese, Indian, Malaysian and Thai restaurants as they traditionally use a lot of nuts in their dishes so there will always be a risk of cross contamination. Only eat these types of food if you can be sure that the food is nut free and not contaminated with nuts
- Telephone the restaurant in advance to explain your nut-free diet and ensure that they are able to provide an appropriate meal for you. They may want to cook your meal in advance to avoid contamination when the kitchen is busy.
- When you find a helpful restaurant use it regularly so they become familiar with your needs
- Giving the chef written guidelines about your diet as this will help to avoid confusion. These are available at web sites such as **www.dietarycard.co.uk**.
- Avoid self service areas such as salad bars where cross contamination may occur

There are a number of web sites that list restaurants which cater for people with food allergy.

What about children's parties?

Talk to the person organising the party in advance. Some people are happy to provide nut free food. If not you may want to take food for your child. This may be necessary for younger children where contamination may be an issue.

What about travelling abroad?

Make sure you know the words for peanuts/nuts in the local language so you are able to read food labels and explain in restaurants. There are translation services available on line to help you with this preparation.

For example: www.yellowcross.co.uk

It is wise to inform your airline before flying particularly if you are expecting them to provide you with food. Always make sure you have your emergency treatment with you.

Is there a cure for nut allergy?

No, unfortunately there is not cure at present. Research into oral desensitisation with peanut flour is currently in progress.

Key reference sources and further information

Nut Allergy Awareness products:

www.kidsaware.com

Organisations:

British Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology

www.bsaci.org

www.actionagainstallergy.co.uk

www.allergyuk.com

www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

If you need further advice please contact:

Royal Surrey County Hospital: 01483 571122

Dietetic department: Ext 4202

Allergy Nurse Specialist: Ext 4140

Immunology department: Ext 2323

This leaflet is produced by the Immunology and Dietetic departments at The Royal Surrey County Hospital, NHS Foundation Trust. It is not a substitute for dietary advice given to a specific individual by a dietitian. If you need to see a dietitian, ask your GP or consultant for a referral. Please note that the information in this leaflet was correct at time of writing. The ingredients of manufactured products can change.

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Royal Surrey County Hospital (RSCH) NHS Foundation Trust fully subscribes to the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) *Being Open* best practice framework, November 2010.

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–4.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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