

# Managing Oral Allergy Syndrome

**Nutrition and Dietetics**

## **This leaflet tells you about diet in relation to Oral Allergy Syndrome (OAS).**

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OAS is a medical term used to describe an allergic reaction to certain foods, which is usually limited to the lips, tongue and throat. OAS can affect people of all ages.

### **What are the symptoms of OAS?**

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#### **The symptoms include:**

- Tingling of the lips.
- Tingling, itching and/ or swelling of the mouth and/or tongue.

The symptoms may not affect all areas; they can usually start within minutes of eating the food and usually settle within the hour.

OAS is generally not a serious problem unless the swelling in the mouth or throat is enough to affect your breathing, or the allergic reaction becomes more generalised (this is rare).

### **What causes OAS?**

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Fresh fruit, vegetables and nuts are the most common causes of the OAS. It has been shown that pollens from trees, grasses and weeds contain proteins of a similar structure to those present in certain fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts and spices. When a hay fever sufferer makes antibodies against the pollens, these antibodies can cross react with food proteins. These can trigger an allergic reaction in a susceptible person. This is why OAS is sometimes referred to as Pollen Food Syndrome (PFS).

People with OAS who have Birch pollen allergy will get spring time hay fever. Those with grass pollen allergy will get summer time hay fever. People with weed (Mugwort, Ragweed) pollen allergy will get hay fever in the late summer.

## How do you treat OAS?

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Avoiding the foods that cause the reaction is most important. Usually cooking or processing (pasteurising, canning) destroys the cross reacting protein (allergen), so cooked foods may be safe to eat. However, there are some exceptions to this (e.g. it is difficult to cook nuts thoroughly) and this should have been discussed with you during your consultation. If you have had any serious reactions such as breathing difficulties or a generalised reaction (anaphylaxis), you should avoid the foods in both the raw and cooked form and discuss with your doctor.

## What should you do if you have another reaction?

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**If you do have another reaction the most important thing to do is:**

- Do not eat any more of the food.
- Keep calm and rinse your mouth with water and rest.
- The symptom should settle within 30 minutes to 1 hour.
- Take an antihistamine such as Piriton® to help ease the symptoms.

If you develop difficulties with your breathing, become hoarse and feel your throat is closing or you feel faint then you will need further treatment. You should call an ambulance stating you are having an allergic reaction. If the doctor has prescribed you an EpiPen® then you should use this first and then call for an ambulance.

Fortunately these reactions are very uncommon.

## Can contact with foods that you react to, cause any other symptoms?

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Yes, occasionally preparing fruit and vegetables can cause other types of reactions. These can include:

- A sneezing attack: when peeling or scraping fruit and vegetables as particles can get in the air.
- Conjunctivitis: if you touch your eyes after touching the food.
- Wheals on your hands: allergens can penetrate the skin and cause wheals, also known as “hives” or “nettle rash”

### **The following foods cross react with Birch Pollen, which is the pollen most likely to cause OAS:**

Apple	Almond	Beansprout	Buckwheat
Apricot	Brazil nut	Carrot	Caraway seed
Cherry	Hazelnut	Celery	Coriander
Kiwi	Peanut	Fennel	Honey
Nectarine	Walnut	Mange tout	Parsley
Peach		Onion	Soya
Pear		Parsnip	Wheat
Plum		Peppers	
Strawberry		Potato	
		Spinach	
		Tomato	

**\*\* These lists are intended as a guide only \*\***

**There are other pollens that have similar cross-reactions with foods and which may also cause OAS:**

**Grass pollen**

Kiwi	Potato	Peanut
Melon	Swiss chard	Wheat
Orange	Tomato	
Watermelon		

**Mugwort pollen**

Apple	Broccoli	Aniseed
Banana	Cabbage	Black pepper
Melon	Carrot	Camomile
	Cauliflower	Caraway
	Celery	Coriander
	Fennel	Fennel
	Garlic	Parsley
	Onion	Mustard
	Peppers	

**Ragweed pollen**

Banana	Courgette	Camomile
Melon	Cucumber	Honey
		Sunflower

## **Do you need to avoid all the foods that possibly cross react with the pollen I am allergic to?**

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Unless your doctor or dietitian has told you otherwise, you do not need to avoid a food unless you have had a reaction after eating it.

## **How can you eat properly when you can't have fruit and vegetables?**

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Whilst there may be several fruits and vegetables that you are unable to eat raw, you should still be able to have a healthy balanced diet.

Try cooking the fruit and vegetables. Sometimes microwaving for just 60 seconds or less can be enough to allow you to eat the food. Processing such as canning, juicing or pasteurising, can also make foods more tolerated.

There are many fruits and vegetables available in the UK. You may be able to eat different varieties of the same fruit e.g Granny Smith and Golden Delicious apples are more likely to cause symptoms than Pink Lady or Cox apples. Some people find that larger tomatoes are managed but cherry tomatoes cause them symptoms. Try new types to keep your diet varied, but do this with caution

**Below is a list of fruit and vegetables which do not usually cross react with pollen and therefore rarely cause symptoms in OAS:**

Artichoke	Asparagus
Avocado	Aubergine
Blackberry	Beans
Blackcurrant	Beetroot
Blueberry	Broad beans
Cranberry	Broccoli
Date	Brussel sprouts
Elderberry	Celeriac
Fig	Chickpeas
Guava	Chicory
Gooseberry	Collards
Grapefruit	Cress
Grapes	Cucumber
Kumquat	Curly Kale
Lemon	Green / French beans
Lime	Leek
Lychee	Lettuce
Mango	Mushrooms
Mulberry	Okra
Olive	Peas
Papaya	Pumpkin
Passion Fruit	Radish
Persimmon	Runner beans
Pomegranate	Squash
Raspberry	Swede
Rhubarb	Sweet potato
Star Fruit	Turnip
	Watercress

## Are you nervous about trying new foods?

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Once you have a diagnosis, you may find more foods cause symptoms. You may wish to be cautious when trying new raw fruits or vegetables. If you want to find out whether a new food will cause a reaction you can use the method below. However, if your reactions include swelling of the mouth/throat or wheeze, if you also have asthma, or if you normally react to nuts, do not self-test. Discuss the best way forward with your doctor or dietitian.

1. Touch the outside of your lip with the raw fruit or vegetable and wait for 10 minutes.
2. If you do not have a reaction, chew a small piece of raw food for one minute and spit it out. Wait for 15 minutes.
3. If you still have no symptoms, chew and swallow three small mouthfuls of the fruit or vegetable. If this does not cause problems you are probably safe to eat that food.

## Further information

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### **Allergy UK**

Planwell House  
LEFA Business Park  
Edgington Way  
Sidcup, Kent  
DA14 5BH  
[www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)  
01322 619898

### **British Dietetic Association**

5th Floor, Charles House  
148/9 Great Charles Street  
Queensway  
Birmingham  
B3 3HT  
[www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)  
0121 200 8080

## Reference source

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### **Food Hypersensitivity**

Edited by Isabel Skypala, Carina Venter  
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The information in this leaflet was correct at time of writing.  
Please note that product changes are not the responsibility of the author.





## Contact details

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If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet please contact the Dietetic Department at the address below:

### **Royal Surrey County NHS Foundation Trust**

Department of Nutrition & Dietetics  
Egerton Road, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XX.

**Switchboard telephone:** 01483 571122 ext 4202

**Direct line:** 01483 464119

**Fax:** 01483 464868

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## PALS and Advocacy contact details

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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](mailto:rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–3.00pm, 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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