

## FOOD ALLERGENS

# Fish Allergy

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### What is a fish allergy?

A fish allergy is an immune system response to proteins found in fish. The body mistakes these proteins for a threat and engages defense mechanisms. These defenses appear as symptoms ranging from mild to severe. Management of this allergy involves avoiding fish and fish products. Health-care providers typically suggest people with this allergy avoid all fish.



It's important to understand the difference between a fish allergy and a shellfish allergy. While both are marine animals, they are different creatures. A fish allergy does not make you allergic to shellfish and vice versa. In the case of a fish allergy, the allergen, or product that causes the allergic reaction, is finned fish.

### Identifying the allergen

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recognizes fish as one of the nine major allergy-causing foods. This requires food manufacturers to highlight the use of fish in their product. You can find this in the ingredients list or in a separate "contains" statement near the ingredients list. Fish is a broad term for many different species. Manufacturers must identify the specific type of fish included in a packaged food product.

### People commonly report allergic reactions to:

- Anchovies
- Bass
- Catfish
- Cod
- Flounder
- Grouper
- Haddock
- Halibut
- Herring
- Mahi mahi
- Perch
- Pike
- Pollock
- Salmon

- Snapper
- Swordfish
- Tilapia
- Trout
- Tuna

*\*Adapted from <https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/fish>*

Generally, fish is recognizable in a product. However, there are some unexpected sources to be on the lookout for. Barbecue sauce, Caesar salad dressing, and Worcestershire sauce may contain fish ingredients. The food label will tell you if fish is an ingredient.

Fish are a good source of protein and omega-3 fatty acids. People with fish allergies can usually tolerate shellfish, which contain many of the same beneficial nutrients. A registered dietitian (RD) can help identify foods that safely fit into a balanced and nutritious diet.

## Managing a fish allergy

The best way to manage a food allergy is to avoid the allergen, which in this case is fish.

Symptoms can differ from person to person. Reactions can occur immediately after eating or drinking an allergen or hours later. A previously mild reaction can be severe the next time.

### Symptoms of an allergy can include:

- Skin conditions, like hives,
- Abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea,
- Itching or swelling of the mouth, throat, eyes,
- Shortness of breath, or even
- Anaphylaxis, which happens when your immune

system releases a flood of chemicals that cause you to go into shock. Symptoms of anaphylaxis can include the previously mentioned conditions plus tightness in the throat, coughing, choking, or wheezing, or a severe drop in blood pressure. Anaphylaxis can be life-threatening and requires immediate treatment.

Minor symptoms may improve with the use of an antihistamine, but this does not make it safe to eat the food. Severe reactions, such as anaphylaxis, require medical treatment. Your health-care provider might prescribe medication for emergency treatment of your allergy. It is important to understand how and when to use the medication. Reach out to your health-care provider with any questions.

Food allergies are different from person to person and symptoms may vary. The severity of a reaction can change over time. The only way to prevent a reaction is to avoid the allergen. Working with a health-care provider, specifically a registered dietitian, can help identify safe foods to maintain a varied and nutritious diet.

## References

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