

## FOOD ALLERGENS

# Peanut Allergy

**Anna M. Cason, RDN**  
Senior Extension Associate

---

### What is a peanut allergy?

A peanut allergy causes an abnormal immune system response when a person is exposed to peanuts. This allergy is one of the most common food allergies in both children and adults with symptoms ranging from mild to severe. The main treatment for this allergy is avoidance of peanuts and peanut products.

### Identifying the allergen

Contrary to what the name might suggest, peanuts are not nuts. They are a type of legume (like a bean, lentil, soybean, and pea) that grows underground. Importantly, an allergy to peanuts does not mean you are allergic to nuts or legumes.

Allergic reactions can occur with direct or indirect contact with peanuts. Direct contact includes eating peanuts or peanut-containing foods. An allergic reaction can also occur with direct skin contact to peanuts. An example of indirect contact includes cross-contact of foods or breathing in peanut particles. Cross-contact is when a food that is usually peanut-free contains peanuts. This is typically a result of a food handling mistake during processing. Finally, tiny particles of peanuts can travel through the air and cause a reaction when someone with an allergy breathes them in.

To prevent direct contact, avoid peanuts and peanut products. The best way to identify peanut ingredients is reading ingredients labels. As one of the nine



major allergy-causing foods, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires food manufacturers to label peanut ingredients on packed food and drink products.

### The foods and ingredients listed below are a small list of items that contain peanut allergens.

- Arachis oil (another name for peanut oil)
- Peanut oil (cold-pressed, expelled, or extruded)
- Mandelonas (peanuts soaked in almond flavoring)
- Peanut butter
- Peanut flour

Peanuts are used as ingredients in many different foods and are occasionally found in non-food products. Contact of any kind may cause a reaction in some cases.

### Not all products listed below always contain peanuts but check the labels before using them.

- Alternative nut butters like sunflower seed butter might be produced in a facility that processes peanuts and a risk of cross-contamination exists.

- Candy
- Chili
- Sauces, glazes, and marinades
- Ice creams
- Marzipan
- Nougat
- Pet food
- Baked goods
- Trail mix
- Meat alternatives or meat substitutes

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

Work with a health-care provider like a doctor or registered dietitian (RD) to identify alternatives to foods that you are allergic to.

## Managing a peanut allergy

The best way to manage a peanut allergy is to avoid the allergen, in this case peanuts.

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

- Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. (n.d.). Food Allergies. Retrieved from <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies>
- Peanut allergy. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/peanut-allergy/symptoms-causes/syc-20376175>
- Patel R., Koterba A. P. Peanut Allergy. [Updated 2023 Jul 4]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2023 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK538526>
- Peanut. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/peanut>

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, physical or mental disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. Reasonable accommodation of disability may be available with prior notice. Program information may be made available in languages other than English. University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Kentucky Counties, Cooperating.

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, physical or mental disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. Reasonable accommodation of disability may be available with prior notice. Program information may be made available in languages other than English. University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Kentucky Counties, Cooperating.