

FOOD ALLERGENS

Soy Allergy

Anna M. Cason, RDN
Senior Extension Associate

What is a soy allergy?

A soy allergy is an abnormal immune system response to proteins found in soybeans. This response leads to symptoms ranging from mild, like hives or digestive problems, to severe, like anaphylaxis, which can be life threatening. The only way to treat a soy allergy is to eliminate soy from the diet.

Soybeans are a member of the legume family with beans, peas, lentils, and peanuts. An allergy to soy includes soybeans and any soy products but does not include other legumes.

Identifying the allergen

Soybeans are one of the nine most common foods linked to food allergies according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Because of this recognition, the FDA requires manufacturers to highlight the allergen, in this case soy, in the ingredients list or in a separate “contains” statement near the ingredients list.

Food items and ingredients listed below may cause a reaction in someone with a soy allergy:

- Soy oil (cold-pressed, expelled, extruded)
- Edamame
- Miso
- Soy products (yogurt, milk, ice cream, etc.)
- Soy protein (concentrate, hydrolyzed, isolate)



- Soy sauce
- Tamari
- Tempeh
- Textured vegetable protein (TVP)
— found in many meat alternatives
- Tofu

Soy products are often used in food processing. Some unexpected items may be sources of soy allergens like:

- Baked goods
- Canned items (broths, soups, fish, and meat)
- Protein and energy bars and snacks

- Dairy products
- Infant formulas
- Processed meats
- Sauces
- Candles
- Crayons
- Cleaning products
- Makeup
- Synthetic fabric
- Alcoholic beverages

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

Not all items listed always contain soy ingredients. It's important to note that the labeling law does not apply to non-food items or alcohol. Contacting a manufacturer directly may provide you with a list of ingredients in these products.

Managing a soybean allergy

The best way to manage a soy allergy is to avoid the foods that cause symptoms.

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>
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