

FOOD ALLERGENS

Egg Allergy

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What is an egg allergy?

Eggs are one of the nine most common foods that cause allergic reactions recognized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). They are one of the most common allergy-causing foods in children. Often, children outgrow egg allergies, but not always. With an egg allergy, the immune system reacts in response to a part of the egg. This reaction comes with symptoms that can range from mild to severe.

Identifying the allergen

Eggs are kitchen staples, both consumed whole and used in many recipes. Both egg whites and egg yolks can cause reactions in those with an allergy. Baked goods, like bread and pastries, usually include eggs. Desserts often contain egg in the baked item and possibly in a frosting or meringue on top. Many pastas are made with eggs. Some processed meat dishes, like meatloaf and meatballs, use eggs to keep the ingredients together.

Some potential sources of egg products include:

- Fried foods (in the breading)
- Marshmallows
- Mayonnaise
- Marzipan
- Salad dressings
- Puddings and custards
- Pretzels



Foods labeled “egg-free” may contain egg ingredients still. Some words to keep an eye out for include:

- Albumin
- Globulin
- Lecithin
- Livetin
- Ingredients with the prefix “ova” or “ovo”

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

While spotting a whole egg may be easy to do, eggs as ingredients are often not visible. As one of the nine major food allergens, the FDA requires manufacturers to identify eggs on packaged food and drink labels. However, manufacturers are not required to include potential cross-contamination on the label. A manufacturer may voluntarily label whether it processes a product in a facility with a potential allergen.

If you have an egg allergy, you must remove eggs from your diet. Eggs are a common source of protein, fats, and vitamins and minerals, including many B vitamins and vitamin D. Egg yolks contain choline, a mineral that supports brain health. But they are not the only sources of these nutrients. These vitamins and minerals are found in dairy products and many other protein sources like meat, fish, and cheese. When removing eggs from an eating pattern, consider other sources of these nutrients to maintain a nutrient-dense diet.

Items not found in the kitchen may cause a reaction in some people with an allergy. Some vaccines, or shots to help avoid sickness, can contain egg proteins. The measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccines are produced with eggs but are generally safe for children with an egg allergy. The flu vaccine may contain small amounts of egg proteins. These also typically do not cause a reaction, but there are alternatives available that do not contain the proteins. If you have had a reaction to eggs in the past, talk to your health-care provider before getting a vaccine.

Managing an egg allergy

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

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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