

## FOOD ALLERGENS

# Sesame Allergy

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### What is a sesame allergy?

A sesame allergy is an abnormal immune system response when exposed to sesame. The immune system of the person with the allergy detects the allergen, in this case sesame, as a threat. This leads to symptoms ranging from mild to severe and potentially life-threatening.

### Identifying the allergen

As of January 2023, sesame is the ninth major food allergen according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Because of this recognition, the FDA requires food manufacturers to highlight the allergen on their product label. It may appear under the ingredients list or in a separate “contains” statement found near the ingredients list.

A variety of cuisines around the world use sesame. Foods and the ingredients listed below may cause a reaction for someone with an allergy.

#### **Refer to the food label on packaged food items to identify the ingredients before consuming.**

- Sesame products (flour, oil, paste, salt, seed)
- Sesamol
- Tahini
- Gingelly, gingelly oil
- Benne, benne oil



Some foods commonly contain sesame, and people with a sesame allergy should avoid them.

#### **Not all the items listed always contain sesame, but this list might help you to grasp an idea of some foods that commonly do.**

- Baked goods
- Breadcrumbs
- Cereals, granolas, muesli
- Chips and crackers
- Dressings, sauces, marinades, gravies
- Falafel
- Hummus

- Margarine
- Processed meats
- Soups
- Sushi
- Tempeh
- Meat alternatives like vegetarian burgers

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

The above list does not include all potential allergens. The FDA does not require producers to list ingredients in spice and flavor blends. Contacting a manufacturer may provide you with a list of ingredients. If they state they cannot give the information out, ask if they use sesame specifically as an ingredient.

Sesame is sometimes used in the processing of non-food items as well. “Sesamum indicum” may appear in the ingredients list for these products. This indicates the product uses sesame and should be avoided. Items that may contain the allergen include cosmetic products, medications, nutritional supplements, perfumes, and pet foods.

## Managing a sesame allergy

The best way to manage a sesame allergy is to avoid sesame and foods that contain it.

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 is a life-threatening condition 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

- Sesame. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/sesame>
- 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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