

## FOOD ALLERGENS

# Tree Nut Allergy

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### What is a tree nut allergy?

A tree nut allergy is an immune system response to proteins found in tree nuts. These proteins in the food, which cause the reaction, are known as allergens. Symptoms of a tree nut allergy range from mild to severe. The best way to manage a food allergy is to avoid tree nuts and tree nut products.

Some of the more common tree nuts include walnuts, almonds, cashews, pecans, pistachios, hazelnuts, and Brazil nuts. A provider will generally recommend avoiding all tree nuts for safety.

### Identifying the allergen

Tree nuts are one of the nine most common food allergens recognized by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA requires manufacturers to clearly identify the allergen on labels of packaged food and drink items.



An item with tree nuts must also specify which one it includes. You can find these within the ingredients list on the package or in a separate “contains” statement near the ingredients list. Some companies may voluntarily include that their product was produced in a facility that also processes tree nuts. However, the law does not require this.

### **An individual who is allergic to tree nuts should avoid the following nuts or foods made with them:**

- Almond
- Artificial nuts
- Beechnut
- Brazil nut
- Cashew
- Chestnut
- Litchi/lychee/lychee nut
- Marzipan
- Nut butters
- Pecan
- Pesto
- Pine nut
- Pistachio
- Praline

Tree nut proteins, the specific part of the nut that cause the allergy, may appear in unexpected products.

### **Be cautious and always check labels, especially with some of these items:**

- Desserts
- Candy
- Energy bars
- Flavored coffee
- Marinades
- Sauces
- Mortadella and other processed meats or meat alternatives
- Body care products
- Hair care products
- “Natural” sponges or brushes

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

The FDA identifies coconut as a tree nut. Contrary to the name, coconut is the seed to a fruit and not a nut. A small number of allergic reactions to coconut have been documented. Most of these reactions occurred in individuals who were not allergic to tree nuts.

The above lists do not include all foods or ingredients in foods that may cause a reaction with a tree nut allergy. Working with a health-care provider can allow you to safely identify foods that cause a reaction.

## **Managing a tree nut allergy**

The best way to manage a tree nut allergy is to avoid tree nuts and tree nut products.

Tree nut allergies can cause mild to severe reactions. 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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