

Dietary avoidance – general information

The following information is relevant to all individuals with allergy to any foods and should be printed in conjunction with the appropriate ASCIA dietary avoidance sheet/s for specific food allergens available on the ASCIA website: www.allergy.org.au/patients/food-allergy

It is important to note that all individuals with food allergy should have:

- An ASCIA Action Plan for Anaphylaxis (red) or an ASCIA Action Plan for Allergic Reactions (green).
- An adrenaline (epinephrine) autoinjector if considered at risk of anaphylaxis (children under 1 year of age are not usually prescribed an adrenaline autoinjector).
- Regular review by their usual medical practitioner and an allergy specialist as required.

Foods labels

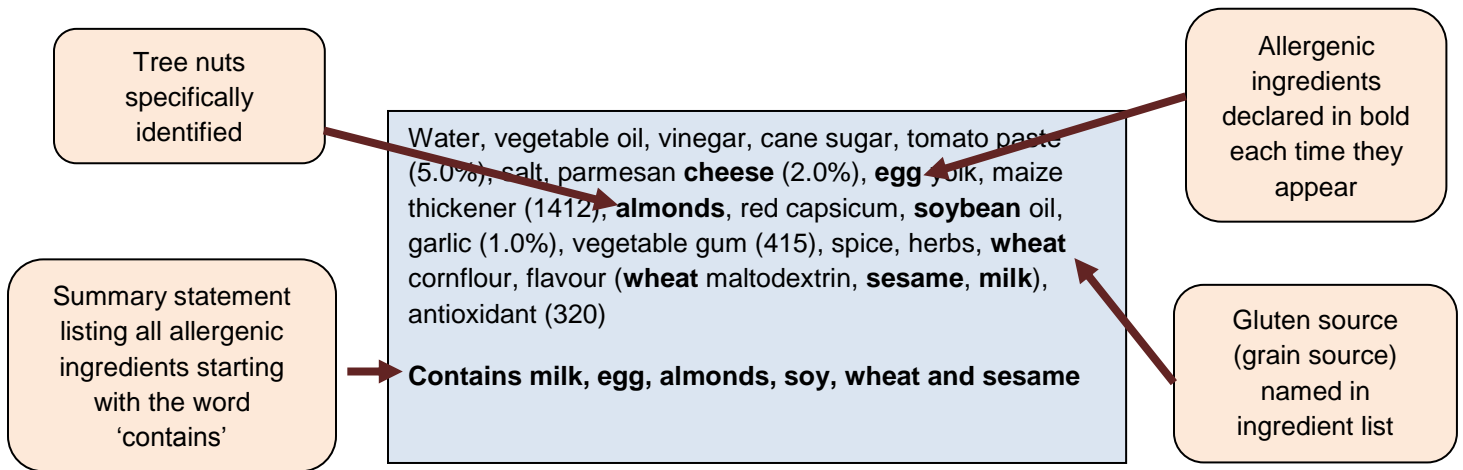
Many manufactured foods contain common food allergens that may not be obvious. Therefore, it is important to **always** check the food label when buying and preparing food **every time** you purchase the product, even if it has been a 'safe' food in the past. Manufacturers can change ingredients and processes at any time without notice.

Reading food labels

- Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) Code 1.2.3 includes mandatory labelling of common food allergens included as:
 - An ingredient
 - Part of a compound ingredient
 - A food additive
 - A processing aid
- Allergens that must be declared include peanuts, tree nuts, cow's milk (dairy), egg, soy, fish, shellfish, sesame and gluten. The source of the gluten (such as wheat) should also be declared.
- Labelling of less common allergens such as rice, corn and potato is not mandatory.
- Precautionary allergen statements used to declare cross contamination risk (such as 'may contain...') are not compulsory for food manufacturers.
- If the food is a high risk food (such as bakery products and snack foods), you may wish to contact the manufacturer to discuss the level of cross contamination risk and with what allergens.
- Unlabelled food or food consumed outside the home generally poses a much higher risk than food labelled as possibly containing traces. Discuss what to do about these foods with your allergy specialist.

For more information about the Food Standards Code, visit the FSANZ website www.foodstandards.gov.au

An example of how food allergens should be declared on a food label is shown on the following page.



Adapted from The Coeliac Society of Western Australia Inc

'Free from' products

- Some products are manufactured specifically to replace or exclude an allergen (such as 'gluten free').
- Even if the product is labelled 'free from', it is important to check the ingredients list for foods to which you or your child are allergic, as well as checking for precautionary allergen statements (such as 'may contain').
- If choosing a 'free from' product, check that the preparation instructions do not require the addition of a food to which you or your child are allergic.

Mistakes that can occur when purchasing foods

Examples include:

- Food labels are not read or understood.
- A person does not disclose their allergy when purchasing unpackaged foods from a food outlet such as a bakery, café or restaurant.
- Waiters or service staff not communicating important information about a customer's allergy to the chef.
- A family member forgets to check ingredients or disclose allergen/s.

Eating out

Examples of situations that require advanced planning and communication:

- **Eating out** at parties, restaurants, other food outlets, other homes.
- **Institutions** such as schools, childcare services, workplaces, universities, hospitals.
- **When travelling**, including camps, hotels, airlines, public transport.

It is important to be assertive. Before ordering, advise food service staff about your allergy clearly, and ask questions about ingredients, food preparation, storage and service.

If you are not sure that the food is suitable, do not eat it. If you have been prescribed an adrenaline autoinjector, do not eat unless you have it with you.

Preparing safe meals at home

- Choose appropriate ingredients.
- Teach other household members and visitors about not sharing food and drinks.
- Be aware of cross contamination when storing, preparing and serving foods such as:
 - Use separate cooking equipment
 - Prepare allergen free food first
 - Ensure adequate cleaning

Possible sources of cross contamination

- Processing:
 - Shared manufacturing lines
 - Packaging lines
 - Transport and storage of ingredients
- Point of purchase:
 - Food sold in bulk containers and distributed using shared serving utensils
 - Delicatessen items
- Food preparation using shared equipment:
 - Knives
 - Blenders
 - Cutting boards
 - Shared frying pans and deep fryers
 - Barbecues
- Food service:
 - Buffets
 - Juice bars

Additional tips for food allergic children

- Develop strategies to help manage food allergy if the allergen is in the home, including:
 - Have a shelf or container in the pantry and fridge for suitable foods for the food allergic child.
 - For very young food allergic children, consider storing the allergen out of reach or in a locked cupboard.
- For very young and mobile food allergic children consider not having the allergen in the house.
- Ensure that everyone who looks after your child (relatives, babysitters, friends, childcare, school staff) fully understands your child's allergies. They should understand the importance of avoiding food allergens and how to treat an allergic reaction, should accidental exposure occur.
- Children should be encouraged from a young age to ask a trusted adult whether they are allowed to eat foods they may be given.
- If the child has been prescribed an adrenaline autoinjector, ensure it is easily accessible at all times and teach everyone who looks after your child to know when and how to use the device.
- Ensure yearly review by their usual medical practitioner for updating of ASCIA Action Plans and where indicated, for renewal of their adrenaline autoinjector prescription and re-training in its use.
- Individuals with multiple food allergies may require advice from a dietitian to ensure their nutritional needs are met.

Non-food sources of food allergens

- Some cosmetics, shampoos, lotions, medications and alternative therapy products contain food allergens and it is not mandatory to include this information on these product labels.
- Touching or smelling may trigger mild allergic symptoms but it is unlikely to cause anaphylaxis as the food allergen usually needs to be ingested.

Pet food can trigger allergic reactions

Pet food can also contain allergens. While children may not eat the food, the dog or cat may lick them triggering a local reaction. Allergic individual should wash their hands after handling pet food.

Further information

- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIA): www.allergy.org.au
- Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia (Australian patient support): www.allergyfacts.org.au
- Allergy New Zealand (New Zealand patient support): www.allergy.org.nz
- Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (food labelling): www.foodstandards.gov.au

Acknowledgements

This series of patient information on dietary avoidance of food allergens has been reviewed by ASCIA members and is based on expert opinion and the available published literature at the time of review.

Development of this series is not funded nor influenced by commercial organisations.

This series includes information sourced, with permission, from:

- Several Allergy Units in Australia and New Zealand who have shared their resources.
- Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia Ingredients Cards.

© ASCIA 2014

ASCIA is the peak professional body of clinical immunology/allergy specialists in Australia and New Zealand

Website: www.allergy.org.au

Email: info@allergy.org.au

Postal address: PO Box 450 Balgowlah NSW 2093 Australia

Disclaimer

Dietary avoidance should only be undertaken if there is a medically confirmed food allergy. Please check with your medical specialist to ensure this educational information is appropriate to you. This document has been developed and peer reviewed by ASCIA members and is based on expert opinion and the available published literature at the time of review. Information contained in this document is not intended to replace medical advice and any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment should be directed to a medical practitioner. The development of this document is not funded by any commercial sources and is not influenced by commercial organisations.

Content updated 2014