

ACCOMMODATING FOOD ALLERGIES

GENERAL OVERVIEW

According to FARE (Food Allergy Research and Education) 15 million Americans and nearly 6 million children in the United States have a food allergy. That's 1 in every 13 children, two in every classroom.

Most childhood allergies to milk, egg, wheat and soy generally resolve in childhood. However, a study done by Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine reveals that they appear to be resolving more slowly than in previous decades, with many children still allergic beyond the age of 5.

The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) states the top 8 food allergies are: Milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, wheat, soy, fish and shellfish. These 8 account for 90% of all food related allergic reactions. Most food related symptoms and reactions occur within 2 hours of ingestion; often, symptoms and reactions will start within minutes.

Top 8 Food Allergies

Milk
Eggs
Peanuts
Tree Nuts
Wheat
Soy
Fish
Shellfish

Common Symptoms and Reactions

- Vomiting and/or stomach cramping
- Hives
- Wheezing
- Repetitive cough
- Anaphylaxis
- Pale/blue coloring of the skin
- Shock or circulatory collapse
- Tight, hoarse throat/trouble swallowing
- Shortness of breath
- Swelling of the tongue
- Weak pulse
- Dizziness or feeling faint

FOOD ALLERGIES IN SCHOOL

Statistics given by FARE show that more than 15% of school age children with food allergies have had a reaction in school. These incidents happen in multiple locations throughout the school and are not limited to the cafeteria. Be mindful of bake sales, classroom parties and snacks outside the cafeteria.

Parents should work with their school to create an emergency action plan that details the steps that will be taken if the child comes in contact with his/her allergen(s). A checklist, along with a guide, has been created by FARE that will help schools and parents to manage food allergies within the school. The checklist is as follows:

1. † Become informed and educated.
2. † Prepare and provide information about your child's food allergy and medication.
3. † Build a team.
4. † Help ensure appropriate storage and administration of epinephrine.
5. † Help reduce food allergens in the classroom(s).
6. † Consider school meals.
7. † Address transportation issues.
8. † Prepare for field trips and extracurricular activities.
9. † Prevent and stop bullying.
10. † Assist your child with self-management.

FOOD ALLERGIES IN CHILD CARE

Child Care providers should work together with parents and families to ensure that a plan is in place in case a child comes in contact with his/her allergen. Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, along with Extension, have created steps that can be taken by the provider to help accommodate food allergies.

- Discuss food plans and allergies with families when you initially enroll the child.
- Prepare for reactions.
- Know your ingredients.
- Recognize that dietary supplements are sometimes needed.
- Avoid cross contamination
- Consider prohibiting certain foods from the child care program.

AVOIDING ALLERGENS

Being aware of food labels is a great way to keep an eye on possible allergens. The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) requires that the 8 major allergens must be declared in simple terms, either in the ingredient list or via a separate allergen statement. “May contain” labels are voluntarily added at the manufacturers’ discretion and are not regulated by FALCPA. When in doubt about a products ingredients contact the manufacturer, and they should be able to confirm or deny the presence of a certain allergen.

Keep in mind
FALCPA does NOT regulate the use of precautionary and advisory labeling such as “May Contain”. These precautionary and advisory labels are voluntarily added by the manufacturers.

Avoiding certain foods is easier said than done. The ACAAI recommends going to a dietitian or a nutritionist. These food experts will offer tips or avoiding trigger food while still getting all of the proper nutrients. They may also be able to give you a list of foods you can substitute for recipes and alternative products you can try.

Also be mindful that certain foods go by many names and nicknames. Gluten for example has many names; it can be listed as wheat, malt, barley, rye, bulgur, durum...etc. A nutritionist/dietitian should be able to give you a full list of all the possible names.

FOOD ALTERNATIVES

According to the product websites for Daiya (cheese, yogurt, dressing etc.) and Enjoy Life (chewy bars, cookies, brownies, chips etc.) both brands offer products that are free from all 8 common allergies.

Some other products that you can look further into to see if they fit for your specific allergy needs are:

- Silk
- So Delicious Dairy Free
- King Arthur
- Annie’s
- Amy’s
- Almond Breeze
- Yoplait

SOURCES:

American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

FARE- Food Allergy Research Education

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

Extension

Celiac Support Association