



# NORTH TEXAS ALLERGY & ASTHMA ASSOCIATES

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## FOOD ALLERGY

### What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is an exaggerated reaction in the body's immune system to something you ate or drank. Food allergies are more common in young children and in people who suffer from other allergies, such as hay fever and eczema.

### How does it occur?

The most common causes of food allergies are cow's milk, eggs, peanuts and other tree nuts, seafood (especially shellfish), wheat, peas, beans, tomatoes, spices, and/or fresh fruit.

### What are the symptoms?

Reactions are varied and may occur immediately or not for several hours. Symptoms can be mild, or they may be life threatening if breathing problems develop. Symptoms may include:

- tingling in the mouth or swelling in the lips, face, and/or throat
- vomiting or diarrhea
- cough or wheezing
- skin rash or hives

### How is it diagnosed?

We will ask you about your symptoms and the foods that you eat. If your symptoms are **not severe**, you might be able to find which foods cause them by not eating certain foods for a while. Then you can carefully try eating these foods one by one to see if your symptoms reappear. If your symptoms are severe and there are no obvious causes, then it may be possible to have allergy skin tests for common food allergies such as egg, cow's milk, citrus, nuts, and shellfish.

### How is it treated?

The only effective treatment is to avoid the food that causes the allergy. We may prescribe certain anti-allergy medications to carry with you in case of unexpected reactions. If you are having food allergy symptoms that are not getting better and you are developing throat tightness or having trouble breathing, call 911 for emergency help.

### How long will the effects last?

The effects of the allergic reaction last from several minutes to hours, depending on how much of the food you ate and the intensity of your allergy. Some food allergies are outgrown while others are life-long. The vast majority of children who are allergic to milk, eggs, soy, and wheat outgrow their allergies. However, allergies to peanuts, nuts, fish, and shellfish are almost never outgrown.

### How can I take care of myself?

If you have symptoms of food allergy:

- Allow your body to rest by drinking clear liquids (such as water, juice, tea, etc) frequently during the day
- Reduce your normal activities until the diarrhea stops
- If you are nauseated, suck on ice chips
- After the symptoms subside, you may add cooked cereal, rice, custard, baked potatoes, and carbonated beverages to your diet
- Return to your normal diet 2 or 3 days later. Fruit, alcohol, and highly seasoned and spicy foods should be avoided for several more days
- Use milk-free substitutes if you are allergic to milk
- Keep track of all reactions and avoid foods that cause reactions
- Check the ingredients on food package labels
- Ask about the ingredients in foods prepared in restaurants when you eat out