Nut Allergy

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Introduction

Nuts and peanuts are a highly nutritious food and cause no problems for the majority of the population. Peanuts are not actually nuts but legumes. They belong to the same family as peas, beans and lentils. The majority of children and half the adults who are allergic to peanuts are also allergic to tree nuts, such as walnuts, cashews or Brazil nuts.

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is a reaction to an otherwise harmless food or food component that causes the body’s immune system to react abnormally to the protein in that particular food.

Is nut allergy dangerous?

Allergic reactions to nut can be severe, the first symptoms to appear can include:

- Sneezing
- Tingling sensations of lips, tongue and throat
- Feeling unwell with light-headedness
- Swelling

Other reactions that have been reported are:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Urticaria (itchy rash)
- Angioedema (swelling of the face, throat or skin)
- Acute abdominal pain
- Exacerbation of eczema
- Anaphylactic shock (severe drop in blood pressure and collapse) that can be fatal if not treated
These symptoms typically appear within minutes of eating the nuts. Severe reactions may have a slow onset that may return hours after an apparent resolution. Asthmatics with nut allergy are more likely to develop life-threatening reactions.

**Does nut allergy run in families?**

Recent studies indicate an increased likelihood of allergy especially if children come from atopic families (a family with a history of allergy).

However, the studies also showed that avoiding eating nuts when pregnant or delaying giving nuts to children under three made no difference to whether the child developed nut allergy. If the mother is allergic to nuts then she should avoid them.

Children under the age of 5 should not be given any kind of whole nut due to the risk of choking.

**How is nut allergy diagnosed?**

- History of reactions and possible trigger factors will be discussed with the Doctor
- Skin prick test (please see skin prick test leaflet for further details)
- A blood test (RAST test) which examines the number of nut antibodies in a small blood sample. An antibody is a protein made by the body to detect ‘foreign objects’ such as bacteria and viruses. In allergy, antibodies are produced to things that are not actually harmful, for example nuts or pollen.
- A food challenge may be considered if the Doctor feels this may aid diagnosis. (Please see our leaflet about food challenges for further details.)
How can it be treated?

There is no cure for nut allergy at present. Once your allergy has been diagnosed it is very important that all sources of nuts are excluded from your diet at all times, as this is the only way to prevent further reactions. Nut allergy is typically life long.

Research is ongoing in this area and at present there are trials in progress to attempt to desensitise people who have nut allergy. However this process is not yet widely available and not currently offered at this hospital.

You may be advised by your Doctor to carry antihistamines in case of a reaction. You may also be prescribed an Epipen if your immunology doctor feels it may be required.

As legumes are chemically similar to peanuts, allergic individuals may also react to them. However, if you have already eaten these foods without a reaction it is safe to continue to eat them.

Food can be contaminated by touching other food that contains nuts. It is advisable to avoid all loose foods such as in delicatessens and bakers unless they can guarantee the food has been stored correctly.

You may wish to wear a SOS medical emblem; for example a Medic Alert emblem, which instantly informs others of what treatment you may require.

Can the allergy be outgrown or lost?

Studies have shown that young children may grow out of peanut allergy but this is unlikely for older children and adults. Therefore nut avoidance should be life-long. If you wish to be retested you need to discuss this with your doctor to ensure this is the right action to take.
What foods may contain nuts?

Although manufacturers have become more aware of nut allergy and are labelling products more clearly, nuts may be a hidden ingredient or have been used in a previous product manufactured with the same equipment. If you are uncertain whether nut may have been used it is best to contact the manufacturer for advice.

Sometimes there are problems with “safe foods” being contaminated with nuts. If this has happened with a product’s batch, the manufacturer will publicise this and inform allergy charities.

Here is a list of foods that may contain nuts and safe alternatives.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foods to Avoid</th>
<th>Foods Allowed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oils</strong></td>
<td><strong>Foods to Avoid</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended oils, unrefined/ Gourmet peanut oil, arachis oil, groundnut oil and stir fry oil. See also further advice below this table</td>
<td>Sunflower oil, olive oil, safflower oil, corn oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biscuits</strong></td>
<td><strong>Foods Allowed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All biscuits containing nuts or nut oils, Coconut biscuits, Macaroons.</td>
<td>Homemade biscuits made with known safe source of oil. Those checked for ingredients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preserves</strong></td>
<td><strong>Preserves</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut butter, chestnut puree, chocolate &amp; hazelnut spread, praline spread, sweet mincemeat.</td>
<td>Jam, marmalade, honey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cakes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cakes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas cake, fruit cake, stolen, cakes containing marzipan, carrot cake, passion cake, cakes bought in delicatessens, cakes containing vegetable oil.</td>
<td>Home-made cakes, containing known safe ingredients. Cakes guaranteed nut free by manufacturers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cereals</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cereals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crunchy Nut Cornflakes, fruit &amp; Fibre, muesli, Shreddies, etc.</td>
<td>Weetabix, Cornflakes, Rice Krispies, shredded wheat, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dips Sauces</strong></td>
<td><strong>Dips Sauces</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pesto sauce, Waldorf salad, Thai, satay sauce.</td>
<td>Sauces checked for ingredients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vegetarian food</strong></td>
<td><strong>Vegetarian food</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nut loaf, vegeburgers, sausages.</td>
<td>Some products may be okay - Check ingredients label and with manufacturers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Desserts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Desserts</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nut yoghurt, nut ice-creams, cakes (see above), puddings containing nuts.</td>
<td>Home-made puddings using known safe ingredients, those checked for ingredients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sweets</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sweets</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts, nougat, nut brittle, halva, Snickers, Topic, Fruit &amp; Nut chocolate bars, Bounty, Toblerone, Liquorice Allsorts, Pralines, Florentines. Always check labels.</td>
<td>Several chocolate manufacturers produce nut free ranges - check product labels and contact them for further details.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Chinese, Indian &amp; Thai foods, e.g. korma, noodles, Bombay Mix, Sesame seeds, Tahini;</td>
<td>Houmous, lecithin, hydrolysed vegetable protein;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further advice about peanut oils

Peanut oil may be present in goods in a refined or unrefined form. Studies show that refined oil is generally not a problem and if anyone does suffer a reaction it is likely to be mild. Refined oil is most commonly found in food and may be present in foods labelled as containing ‘Vegetable Oil’. The advice given by the Anaphylaxis Campaign is that this type of oil is usually safe. If you are, however, concerned about this, speak to your Doctor or Dietician, it may be possible to test for a reaction.

Unrefined peanut oil has been shown to contain protein. A code of practice is being set up to ensure all foods within the UK containing unrefined peanut oil will be labelled as containing nuts. Until this happens you should check for all oils on the ‘Foods to Avoid’ list. Foods from non-UK suppliers may also contained unrefined oil. Avoid if labelling is unclear.

What should be considered when eating out?

- It may be useful to use a few tried and tested restaurants so you can build up some trust with the staff.
- Check with the Chef what kind of oil is used in cooking.
- Plainer foods are safer.
- Check that no nut products have been used and explain that this means foods such as marzipan, coconut, satay, etc.
- Be particularly careful in Oriental and Indian restaurants.
- Remember to take any treatment you may need with you
Are there other products that contain nuts?

Some creams, shampoo and other body products may also contain nut extracts and should be avoided. They may appear on the ingredients list under their latin name.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peanut oil</th>
<th>Arachis Hypogaea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bitter Almond</td>
<td>Prunus Amara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Almond</td>
<td>Prunus dulcis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesame</td>
<td>Sesamum Indicum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walnut</td>
<td>Juglans Regina or Juglans Nigra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Bertholetia Excelsa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some medical products may also contain nuts so ensure your doctors and pharmacists are aware of your allergy.

References and Further Information

Allergy UK (2009) Peanut or nut free diet. Available at: www.allergyuk.org/fs_nutfreediet.aspx [Last Accessed ???]


North Bristol Trust (2010) Food challenges. Patient information leaflet no: NBT002306
Patient UK (2011) Nut Allergy. Available at www.patient.co.uk/health/Nut-Allergy.htm

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peanutallergyuk.co.uk – a forum for discussion about peanut allergy

NHS Constitution. Information on your rights and responsibilities. Available at www.nhs.uk/aboutnhs/constitution
If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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