

# Nuts and allergy

Tree nuts such as **almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, chestnuts, hazelnuts, macadamias, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios** and **walnuts** are full of beneficial substances for good health. Despite this, *tree nut allergies*, are a common food allergy in infants and children, that can persist into adulthood. While peanuts are a legume and not a tree nut up to half of those with peanut allergy will also have a tree nut allergy.<sup>1</sup> If you have a nut allergy, it is important you know how to manage it correctly.



## What is a food allergy?

A food allergy occurs when the immune system reacts to an allergen (a protein) in a food. If you have an allergy to tree nuts, your reaction is likely to occur within 20 minutes to 2 hours of eating them and can rapidly progress to life threatening. Food allergy is different to food intolerance. Food intolerance does not involve the immune system and reactions are often mild, occurring many hours after eating the food. It's important to distinguish food intolerance from a food allergy. If you have food intolerance, you can usually eat small amounts of problem foods without a reaction as you can "tolerate" small quantities. By contrast, if you have a true food allergy, even a tiny amount of the food may trigger a serious reaction.

## How common are allergies?

There is no current published Australian data available on how many Australians have medically diagnosed nut allergies but studies are underway. A survey of parents in the Australian Capital Territory found that over 1 in 50 children are estimated to have diagnostic test-confirmed peanut sensitisation with nearly half avoiding eating peanuts.<sup>2</sup> Data from the United States indicates that around 1% of adults has a self reported peanut or tree nut allergy and rates for children have doubled to around 2% from 2003 to 2010.<sup>3</sup>

## How are tree nut allergies diagnosed?

All food allergies are diagnosed by way of testing and from clinical history. A university trained medical allergy specialist reviews results of a skin prick test or blood test and asks questions on what has happened on previous exposure to the suspect food/s. A diagnosis is made

based on both the patients' history and tests results. If you suspect you have a tree nut allergy, ask your doctor for a referral to an allergy specialist.

## Signs and symptoms of a mild to moderate allergic reaction to any food

In people with food allergies, common reactions include:

- Swelling of the lips, face, eyes
- Hives or welts
- Tingling in the mouth
- Abdominal pain, vomiting

## Signs and symptoms of a severe allergic reaction or anaphylaxis

- Difficult/noisy breathing
- Swelling of the tongue
- Swelling/tightness in the throat
- Difficulty talking/ hoarse voice
- Persistent dizziness or collapse
- Young children can become pale and floppy

Most allergic reactions are not life threatening. Although severe allergies can be life threatening, and while rare, fatalities do occur. Teenagers and young adults with peanut and tree nut allergy are at greatest risk of fatal allergic reactions. Those with severe allergies should keep an emergency medical kit close by at all times. Emergency medication comes in the form of an adrenaline autoinjector called either an EpiPen® or Anapen®. An Action Plan for Anaphylaxis must be kept with the autoinjector and followed if signs of an allergic reaction occur. Those at risk of anaphylaxis and their carers need always be prepared for accidental ingestion. Parents can teach their allergic children, at

an age appropriate time, to manage their condition by encouraging them to ask questions, read labels, identify nuts<sup>4</sup>, and carry and administer medications. Children and teens with allergies need to feel comfortable and secure in their ability to make their own decisions about food. Peer support is also an important part of this process.

## What is the best treatment for tree nut allergy?

If you have a known allergy to one type of nut, it is often recommended that you avoid all nuts until carefully controlled and administered medical food challenge tests can determine if you are allergic to other nuts. You will require a definite diagnosis and a planned approach that avoids the allergic food. Consultation with a Clinical Immunologist and Allergist is recommended. Reading ingredient labels for all foods, cosmetics, lotions, medication (both over the counter and prescribed) and herbal treatments is also key. If unsure about the ingredients in a product, do not eat or use it until you have contacted the manufacturer. Consultation with an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) who specialises in food allergy may also help.

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For further information on nuts and health refer to [www.nutsforlife.com.au](http://www.nutsforlife.com.au) or phone **02 9460 0111**  
Or for information on anaphylaxis go to [www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au) or [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

Nuts for Life is an initiative of the Australian Tree Nut Industry. Go Nuts for Life. Go Nut for Health.  
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## How do I know if a product contains tree nuts?

In 2002 it became law to state the presence of commonly allergenic foods (including nuts) on packaged food labels.

Always read ingredient lists carefully. If you have a nut allergy, avoid products that contain the terms listed here in the ingredients list. This list has been developed as a guide only. Other ingredients may contain, or have come into contact with, nuts. Always check with the manufacturer if you are unsure.

In addition to this labelling, many food manufacturers choose to highlight the risk of accidental cross-contact between products that do contain allergens and products that do not contain allergens, sometimes using statements such as “May contain traces of peanuts or tree nuts”.

If you have been cleared to eat certain types of nuts it may be best to buy those nuts in shell to avoid any cross contact between nut varieties. Remember too if eating away from home, always ask about food content; do not presume food ‘should’ be fine because you have had that dish before or have eaten at that venue before.

## How to get all the nutrition that nuts contain so you're not missing out?

If you do have nut allergies a balanced diet will give you the nutrients you need to maintain your health and wellbeing. By excluding nuts and products that contain nuts you may need to pay extra attention to the foods that make up your daily diet. If you believe you may be missing essential nutrients as a result of dietary restrictions you can consult your doctor or your local Accredited Practising Dietitian who has experience in food allergy.

## Nut ingredients:

- Almonds
- Amoretto
- Artificial nuts
- Bitter almond
- Brazil nuts
- Bunya nuts
- Carponata
- Candle nuts
- Cashews
- Chestnuts
- Gianduja
- Hazelnuts/Filberts
- Hickory nuts
- Indian nuts
- Macadamia nuts
- Mixed nuts
- Non-gai nuts
- Natural nut extract
- Nut butters
- Nut flavourings
- Nut meal
- Nut oil
- Nut paste
- Nut pieces
- Peanut
- Peanut butter
- Peanutamide
- Pecans/mashuga nuts
- Pine nuts (pinyon nuts, pignolia nuts)
- Pistachios
- Shea nuts
- Walnuts

## Products which may contain tree nuts include:

- African dishes
- Asian/Indian dishes
- Baked goods
- Biscuits
- Breakfast cereals
- Chocolate
- Chocolate spreads
- Dried fruit mixes
- Flavoured coffees, drinks
- Frozen desserts
- Health food/muesli/nut bars
- Ice cream
- Marzipan/almond paste
- Mexican dishes
- Nougat
- Pastries
- Pesto
- Salads
- Vegetarian/vegan dishes

## References

1. Sicherer SH, Burks AW and Sampson HA. Clinical features of acute allergic reactions to peanut and tree nuts in children. *Pediatrics* 1998; 102(1):E61–E66
2. Kljakovic M, Gatenby P, Hawkins C, Attewell RG, Ciszek K, Kratochvil G, Moreira A, Ponsonby AL. The parent-reported prevalence and management of peanut and nut allergy in school children in the Australian Capital Territory. *J Paediatr Child Health* 2009 Mar; 45(3):98–103.
3. Sicherer SH, Muñoz-Furlong A, Godbold JH, Sampson HA. US prevalence of self-reported peanut, tree nut, and sesame allergy: 11-year follow-up. *J Allergy Clin Immunol.* 2010 Jun; 125(6):1322–6.
4. Hostetler TL, Hostetler SG, Phillips G, Martin BL. The ability of adults and children to visually identify peanuts and tree nuts. *Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol.* 2012 Jan; 108(1):25–9.

Anaphylaxis Australia has reviewed this fact sheet.