

# FOOD ALLERGY FACT SHEET

## Peanut Allergies

### Why should special precautions be taken with peanut allergies?

Peanuts are one of the most dangerous allergies because peanuts tend to cause particularly severe reactions. Peanut allergies account for the largest number of allergy-related deaths and the greatest incidence of anaphylaxis (a serious allergic reaction that can cause death). For some individuals, trace amounts of peanuts can cause a severe reaction. Non-ingestion contact (such as touching peanuts or inhaling peanut particles) is less likely to trigger severe reactions compared with ingestion contact. Even so, extreme caution should always be used because proximity to peanuts increases the opportunity for ingestion.

The prevalence of peanut allergies in American children tripled from 1997 to 2008. Still, approximately 20-25% of children with a peanut allergy do outgrow it.

### What are the symptoms?

The most common symptoms of an allergic reaction to peanuts include:

- Eczema (atopic dermatitis)
- Hives (urticaria)
- Asthma
- Runny nose
- Digestive symptoms
- Anaphylaxis

### What foods contain peanuts?

There are many unexpected sources of peanuts, so reading food labels is important to eliminate exposure to peanuts. Peanuts are often ingredients in prepared products and in ethnic cuisines, such as African, Chinese, Indonesian, Mexican, Thai, and Vietnamese. Artificial nuts can be peanuts that have been deflavored and reflavored with pecan, walnut, or almond. Mandelonas are peanuts soaked in almond flavoring.

Many items may not contain peanuts but may be produced in a facility where peanuts processed or used as an ingredient. As a result, cross-contact with peanuts may occur. Many snack foods may be produced in a facility where many different types of snack foods or many different varieties of a product (for example, cereal bars) are produced. Some of the varieties of that product may include peanuts or peanut butter. A product that is labeled as being produced in a facility with peanuts should not be consumed by an individual with a peanut allergy.



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Examples of products that might contain peanuts include:

- Artificial nuts
- Beer nuts
- Candy
- Cereals
- Cold pressed, expressed, or expelled peanut oil
- Egg rolls
- Frozen yogurt and ice cream
- Glazes and marinades
- Granola bars, cereal bars, and breakfast bars
- Ground nuts
- Hydrolyzed plant protein
- Hydrolyzed vegetable protein
- Marzipan
- Mixed nuts
- Nougat
- Peanuts, peanut butter, or peanut flour
- Potato pancakes
- Sauces such as chili sauce, spaghetti sauce, hot sauce, pesto, gravy, mole sauce, and salad dressing
- Some vegetarian food products, especially those advertised as meat substitutes
- Specialty pizzas
- Sweets such as pudding, cookies, and hot chocolate

## How are peanuts located on food labels?

Food labels regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) follow the regulations of the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) by listing the top eight allergens on the label in plain language either in the ingredient list or in a “contains” statement.



For example, granola bars that contain peanuts could be labeled in either of the ways shown below (bold is used for illustrative purposes only):

Label 1	Label 2
<p><b>INGREDIENTS:</b> Roasted peanuts, High maltose corn syrup, Sugar, Dark chocolate chunks (chocolate liquor, sugar, soy lecithin, natural flavor), Whole grain oats, High fructose corn syrup, Rice flour, Palm kernel oil, Fructose, Canola oil, Nonfat milk, salt, Peanut butter (peanuts, salt), Whey, Baking soda, Malt</p> <p>Contains: <b>Peanuts</b>, Milk, Almond, Wheat, and Soy</p>	<p><b>INGREDIENTS:</b> Roasted <b>peanuts</b>, High maltose corn syrup, Sugar, Dark chocolate chunks (chocolate liquor, sugar, soy lecithin, natural flavor), Whole grain oats, High fructose corn syrup, Rice flour, Palm kernel oil, Fructose, Canola oil, Nonfat milk, salt, Peanut butter (<b>peanuts</b>, salt), Whey, Baking soda, Malt</p>

Labels should also be checked for warnings such as, “may contain peanuts,” “produced on shared equipment with peanuts,” or “produced in a plant that uses peanuts in other products.” These foods should be avoided as the product may contain a small amount of peanut through cross-contact.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-regulated foods, namely meat, poultry, and egg products are not required to follow FALCPA labeling regulations but may do so voluntarily. Only common or usual names of the ingredients are required to be identified on these labels.

All child nutrition staff should be trained to read product labels and recognize food allergens. Because food labels change from time to time, school nutrition staff should check labels for peanut and peanut ingredients for every product each time it is purchased. Labels



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should be maintained for a minimum of 24 hours for every product served to a child with food allergies in case of a reaction.

## What substitutes can be used for peanuts in student meals?

When menu substitutions or accommodations for a student with life threatening food allergies are requested, a statement from a physician is required. Refer to the manual *Accommodating Children with Special Dietary Needs in the School Nutrition Programs: Guidance for School Foodservice Staff* on the USDA web site ([www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance/special\\_dietary\\_needs.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Guidance/special_dietary_needs.pdf)) for information on the required content of the physician's statement.

Read and follow the statement exactly. If there is uncertainty about the statement or if it does not provide enough information, contact the household or physician (as permitted by the family) for clarification. Always follow your school's or child care center's policies and procedures.

When planning menus for children with peanut allergies, consider current food choices offered to determine if a reimbursable meal can be selected from foods offered that do not contain peanuts. This approach will minimize the need to prepare special recipes or to make menu substitutions. Child nutrition staff should always carefully read labels, even for foods that generally do not contain peanuts.

Common Menu Items That May Contain Peanuts	Possible Substitutes or Alternatives That Do Not Typically Contain Peanuts*
Granola bars, cereal bars, and breakfast bars	Bars without peanut proteins
Ready-to-eat cereals	Ready-to-eat cereal without peanut proteins
Peanut butter and products including peanut butter	Soy butter, bean spreads
Trail mix or snack mix	Homemade trail mix without peanuts or soy nuts
Baked goods: breakfast breads or rolls, cookies	Homemade breads, rolls, and cookies without peanut proteins

\*Always check the ingredient label to verify ingredients and check for potential cross contamination.



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## Common Questions

### What is a good shelf-stable alternative to a peanut butter sandwich for a field trip?

One option may be to substitute the peanut butter with soy or sunflower seed butters (please see question 2 on nut and seed butters). A few other options include a cheese sandwich, hummus or bean dip and chips, or a pre-cooked meal carried in a cooler with temperature control.

### Can alternative nut butters (for example, cashew nut butter) or seed butters (for example, sunflower seed butter) be substituted for peanut butter?

Many nut and seed butters are produced on equipment used to process peanut butter, therefore making it somewhat of a risky alternative unless the manufacturer specifies that the item is peanut free. Many experts recommend peanut-allergic patients avoid tree nuts, as well. Check with the manufacturer and physician for the safety of these alternatives.

### How should I address a request for a peanut-free environment?

The request should be referred to the school or centers administrator. A school district's or child care center's allergy policy should be based on consensus

from all appropriate stakeholders involved. Many factors must be considered to determine if it is feasible to provide a peanut-free environment. Reasonable accommodations need to be taken if there are students with a peanut allergy, including discouraging food sharing, encouraging hand washing, and providing peanut-free zone guidelines to prevent ingestion, which is the most dangerous type of exposure.

### Can a person with a peanut allergy consume tree nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans, etc.)?

About 30-40% of people with peanut allergies are also allergic to tree nuts, so many allergists recommend that people with peanut allergies also avoid tree nuts. Additionally, the incidence of cross-contact between peanuts and tree nuts during the manufacturing process is high.

### Can a person with a peanut allergy use peanut oil?

Highly processed peanut oil has been shown to be safe for the vast majority of individuals allergic to peanuts. Oils that are cold pressed, expelled, or extruded peanut oil may contain peanut particles and are therefore NOT safe for use. Check with the physician about whether or not peanut oil is safe for the individual with a peanut allergy.

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## Resources

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. (2005). *Peanut allergy*. Retrieved June 23, 2010, from <http://www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=9&sub=20&cont=517>

Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network. (2010). *How to read a label for a peanut-free diet*. Retrieved June 9, 2010, from <http://www.foodallergy.org/page/peanut1>

Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network. (2010). *Peanut allergy*. Retrieved June 9, 2010, from <http://www.foodallergy.org/page/peanut-allergy>

Food Allergy Initiative. (2010). *Peanut allergy*. Retrieved June 3, 2010, from <http://www.faiusa.org/?page=peanuts>



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Sicherer, S. H., Muñoz-Furlong, A., Godbold, J. H., & Sampson, H. A. (2010). *U.S. prevalence of self-reported peanut, tree nut, and sesame allergy: 11-year follow-up*. *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*. Retrieved July 14, 2010, from <http://www.jacion-line.org/article/PIIS0091674910005750/fulltext>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration. (2009). *Food allergies: What you need to know*. Retrieved May 27, 2010, from <http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm079311.htm>

Young, M. C. (2003). Common beliefs about peanut allergy: Fact or fiction. *Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network*. Retrieved June 20, 2010, from [http://www.allergysafecommunities.ca/assets/common\\_beliefs\\_faana\\_2003.pdf](http://www.allergysafecommunities.ca/assets/common_beliefs_faana_2003.pdf) (Reprinted from the Anaphylaxis Canada quarterly newsletter)

## For More Information

Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network, Peanut Allergy  
<http://www.foodallergy.org/page/peanut-allergy>

Food Allergy Initiative, Peanut Allergy  
<http://www.faiusa.org/?page=peanuts>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Food Allergens  
<http://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/FoodAllergens/default.htm>

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