

# Managing food allergies



When you are diagnosed with food allergies, managing them becomes a daily part of life. The following are key strategies to help you successfully manage.

## WHAT'S AN allergen?

An allergen is anything that causes an allergic reaction, such as certain foods. There are different ways to come into contact with a food allergen, like eating and touching.

Understanding how to avoid contact with a food allergen will help prevent allergic reactions.

## UNDERSTANDING food labelling

**Mandatory labelling** – Health Canada requires food manufacturers to clearly label products if they contain one of the government's priority food allergens: peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, fish, crustaceans and molluscs, wheat and triticale, sesame, soy, and mustard, as well as gluten sources and added sulphites.

All priority allergens must be listed in the ingredient list of pre-packaged food.

**Voluntary labelling** – Precautionary statements like "may contain" or "free from" claims are examples of voluntary label statements. These statements are not part of food labelling regulations and are included by food manufacturers at their discretion. However, if used, the manufacturers are legally required to be truthful and not misleading.

## HOW TO READ food labels

Reading labels is important for managing food allergies. It's not possible to know if an allergen is in a food just by looking at it.



### Follow these tips:

Read food labels every time you buy a product.

Do the triple check. Read the label:

1. At the store before buying a product.
2. When you get home and put it away.
3. Before you serve or eat it.

Read the entire ingredient list carefully from start to finish.

Avoid foods with precautionary statements such as "may contain" and packaged foods without an ingredient list.

Avoid foods from bulk bins as the same scoop may have been used in different bins, resulting in cross-contamination.

Contact the manufacturer if you are unsure about the labelling.

Be cautious of imported products because food labelling regulations vary by country.

Read labels on non-food products such as vitamins, skin creams, craft supplies, and pet food, as they can contain food allergens.



## WHAT IS

# cross-contamination?

Cross-contamination is when a small amount of a food allergen gets into another food accidentally, or when it is present in saliva, on a surface, or on an object. This small amount of an allergen could cause an allergic reaction.

Here are some examples of cross-contamination:

**Food-to-food** – For example, peanuts on top of a salad will lead to cross-contamination of other foods in the salad, even if the peanuts are taken off.

**Food-to-object** – Cookware, dishes, utensils, or cooking surfaces that are not properly cleaned before preparing food for someone with a food allergy could lead to cross-contamination.

**Food-to-saliva** – Food allergens can be passed on through saliva from people and pets.

**In food processing** – Cross-contamination can occur in the production of food. It may happen in a shared facility, through shared production lines, or be passed on from suppliers.

## MAKE SURE

# you're prepared

**Always carry your epinephrine auto-injector.** Make sure it has not expired, and practice with a training device.

**Have an Anaphylaxis Emergency Plan.** Visit [foodallergycanada.ca](http://foodallergycanada.ca) to download one.

**Educate others.** Use free [AllergyAware.ca](http://AllergyAware.ca) courses to help others learn vital information about food allergy and anaphylaxis.

**If your child has food allergies,** take steps to educate everyone in their life (including teachers, relatives, and babysitters) about preventing, recognizing, and treating anaphylaxis.

**If you are an adult with food allergies,** inform dining companions and co-workers about your allergy and the location of your epinephrine auto-injector.

**Visit [foodallergycanada.ca](http://foodallergycanada.ca)** for a complete list of tips.

Visit [foodallergycanada.ca](http://foodallergycanada.ca) or call **1 866 785-5660**  
for more information and support.