

FOOD ALLERGIES UNWRAPPED: A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING REACTIONS



What is a food allergy?

The job of the body's immune system is to fight off germs that make you sick, but sometimes it gets confused. A food allergy happens when your immune system mistakenly attacks a harmless protein in food.

Approximately 1 in 20 children has a food allergy.

Common food allergens include egg, cow's milk, peanut and tree nuts, shellfish, wheat, soy, fish and sesame.

Food allergy and food intolerance - what's the difference?

Food allergy

- Involves the immune system.
- Symptoms are usually immediate.
- Can be triggered by a small amount of food.
- Can cause many symptoms throughout the body.
- Can be life-threatening.

Food intolerance

- The digestive system has trouble breaking down a food. The immune system is not involved.
- Symptoms are usually delayed, occurring several hours after eating the food.
- Usually limited to gut symptoms such as nausea, cramps, bloating, gas and diarrhoea.
- Usually triggered by a larger amount of food.
- Can cause great discomfort, but is not life-threatening.

A common cause of food intolerance is lactose intolerance, which is due to the lack of an enzyme required to digest lactose (a milk sugar).





Recognising an allergic reaction and what to do

Symptoms usually occur immediately after eating the food, but can take up to 2 hours to develop.



Mild to moderate reaction

- Itchy or tingling mouth.
- Hives (itchy, red bumpy rashes that looks like mosquito bites) or itchy skin rash.
- Swollen face, eyes or lips.
- Abdominal pain or vomiting.
- Sudden change in behavior.



Action



- Give anti-histamine and monitor for any worsening symptoms.

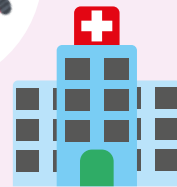


Severe reaction, which can be life-threatening (Anaphylaxis)

- **Airway:** Persistent cough, hoarse voice, difficulty swallowing, swollen tongue.
- **Breathing:** Difficult or noisy breathing, wheeze.
- **Consciousness:** Pale or floppy, suddenly sleepy, persistent dizziness, collapse, unconscious.

Action

1. Lie child flat or if breathing is difficult, allow child to sit. DO NOT stand.
2. Give EpiPen® if you have one.
3. Call 995 for an ambulance.



EpiPen® is currently the only adrenaline autoinjector approved for use in Singapore.

Important: A mild to moderate allergic reaction can quickly turn into a severe or life-threatening reaction, even if it has never occurred before.