

## Food Allergies

Around 15 million Americans, including 1 in 13 children, are living with a food allergy. A food allergy is when the body mistakenly reacts to a certain food or ingredient as if it were harmful. The food that causes the reaction is called an allergen. Symptoms can appear within minutes or up to a few hours after being eaten, inhaled, or coming in contact with the allergen.

Symptoms may include:

- Hives
- Skin rash
- Swelling or itching of tongue or throat and difficulty breathing
- Abdominal cramps, vomiting, nausea, diarrhea
- Trouble swallowing
- Shortness of breath, turning blue
- Drop in blood pressure, feeling faint, confused, weak, passing out
- A weak or thready pulse
- Sense of “impending doom”
- Anaphylaxis
- Death

Anaphylaxis is a serious reaction that comes on quickly and can affect many parts of the body. The most severe symptoms can restrict breathing and blood circulation and can cause death.

The most common foods that cause allergic reactions include:

- Milk
- Eggs
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts (ex. walnuts, almonds, cashews, pistachios, pecans)
- Wheat
- Soy
- Fish
- Shellfish (ex. Shrimp, lobster, crab)

The best food allergy treatment is avoidance of the allergen. This requires reading all labels and avoiding situations where cross-contact may occur. Cross-contact occurs when food containing an allergen comes in contact with food or a surface that does not contain an allergen. For example, using a knife to spread peanut butter and then using that same knife to get jelly out of a jar. In the event of an allergic reaction, some can be treated with antihistamines, like Benadryl. Other, more severe reactions must be treated with epinephrine (Epi-pen) immediately. Always call 911.

As holidays approach, please be considerate of people, especially children, that may have food allergies. Offer choices that are free of their allergens. Ask your guests whether they have any allergies that you should be aware of prior to preparing meals. The Teal Pumpkin Project is a worldwide movement to keep kids with food allergies and restrictions safe at Halloween. Placing a teal painted pumpkin outside your door signifies that you have non-food items available for trick-or-treaters with food allergies.