

# UniversityHealthServices

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## FOOD ALLERGIES

### Definition of Food Allergy

A food allergy is an immune system response. It occurs when the body mistakes a specific food as being harmful. The body creates antibodies (usually IgE) to that food. The next time the person consumes that food an allergic reaction occurs with a release of chemicals (i.e., histamine) to “attack” the “invader”. The symptoms appear within minutes to two hours after the food was eaten. The most common food allergies are to milk, eggs, wheat, peanut, soy, tree nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans, etc.) fish and shellfish.

### Symptoms of Food Allergy

- Tingling, itching or swelling of the lips, tongue or mouth
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or abdominal cramps
- Hives, swelling, itching or rash
- Tightness in the throat, chest pain, difficulty breathing or wheezing
- Anaphylaxis (drop in blood pressure, loss of consciousness and body system failure)

### Treatment of Food Allergy

Although there is currently no cure for food allergies, research is ongoing. At this time, the best approach is to avoid the allergy-causing food. There are medications that can be given to help alleviate the symptoms associated with an allergic reaction when the food is unknowingly consumed.

### Food Intolerance

Food intolerance is not the same as a food allergy. Food intolerance involves the digestive system reacting to an irritating food or being unable to properly digest the food. Lactose intolerance is the most common food intolerance. In lactose intolerance, an enzyme is lacking which is used to digest milk sugar.

### Symptoms of Food Intolerance

- Abdominal gas, cramps, bloating or heartburn
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or abdominal pain
- Headaches, irritability or nervousness

### Diagnosis

Food allergies can be evaluated using different tests. Sometimes a prick skin test is used or the radioallergo sorbent test (RAST) which is a blood test. Food intolerance is usually diagnosed through trial and error or using a food diary.

Children often lose their sensitivity to most of the common allergenic foods (milk, eggs, wheat and soy). Unfortunately, sensitivity to certain foods, such as peanuts, tree nuts, fish and shellfish is rarely lost and sensitivity persists into adulthood.

For further information on food sensitivity:

**Informall Project** ([www.informall.eu.com](http://www.informall.eu.com)) - A clearinghouse of information on food allergies, including consumer-friendly summaries about potentially allergenic plant and animal foods and biochemical synopses for clinicians.

**AllAllergy** ([www.allallergy.net](http://www.allallergy.net)) - Information about asthma, allergy, and food intolerance including resources for both consumers and professionals.

**Allergone Database ([www.allergone.org](http://www.allergone.org))** - A database of allergenic molecules searchable by molecular name, source, or by International Union of Immunological Sciences allergen code – You must register to use it, but it is free.

**Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network ([www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org))** - Mainly an educational site, providing information and advocacy for those who suffer from food allergies or sensitivities.

For more information, contact HealthWorks at 814-863-2500 or the UHS Nutrition Clinic at 814-863-7414.

**Test Results and Advice Nurse**

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

**Appointments**

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

**To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774**

For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at [www.sa.psu.edu/uhs](http://www.sa.psu.edu/uhs)  
This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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