



Navigating Food Assistance Programs with Food Allergies

Getting Started

The mission of a food bank/pantry is to provide healthy nutritious food for those in need. For individuals with food allergies, it can be difficult to find foods that are free of allergens. If you or someone in your family has food allergies, here are things to consider when accessing food at a food bank or pantry.

- Always let staff know that you have a food allergy. Better yet, speak with a supervisor to discuss your needs and what safe food options are available.
- Review original food packaging yourself so you can read the labels. Know the importance of reading every label, every time, as ingredients can change without warning.
- Make sure staff understand the dangers of cross-contact and how to avoid it. Find out what procedures are in place to avoid cross-contact in the storage and/or preparation of food, if it is being prepared on site.
- If food is cooked and/or served on the premises, ask if staff knows how to recognize the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis and what the protocols are for a food-allergic emergency. If you are comfortable, share your Emergency Care Plan with staff. If you do not have a written treatment plan outlining the steps to recognize and treat a severe allergic reaction, consider downloading one from Food Allergy Research & Education at foodallergy.org.
- Managing food allergies can have an emotional impact. Consider reaching out to a community mental health center. If you are a parent, your child's school may offer social work and/or counseling services.

Emergency and Disaster Preparedness

Whether an earthquake, hurricane or wildfire, natural disasters, in addition to man-made ones, can happen at any time, often with little notice. Find out what procedures are in place for accessing allergen-friendly foods from the food bank/pantry during an emergency.

A crisis is never a time to experiment with a new food or product. If you have to go to a public shelter, be sure to identify yourself or your child as having severe food allergies. For more information on preparing for an emergency with food allergies, go to foodallergy.org/faedp.

Additional Resources

Information for Newly Diagnosed

A food allergy diagnosis is life-altering. There is a lot to learn, and it can be tough to know where to start. FARE's *Food Allergy Field Guide* combines our best resources in an easy-to-use format to help equip families with the knowledge to effectively manage food allergies. The Guide is available in English (foodallergy.org/fa-field-guide) and Spanish (foodallergy.org/fa-field-guide-spanish).

Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan

This form outlines recommended treatment in case of an allergic reaction. It can be signed by a physician and includes emergency contact information. Find it on FARE's website in English (foodallergy.org/emergency-care-plan) and Spanish (foodallergy.org/emergency-care-plan-spanish).

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Cross-Contact

If the food bank prepares meals, have a discussion about cross-contact with the person(s) making the food. This includes asking about precautions taken on shared prep and cooking surfaces (like cutting boards and grills) and with utensils (like spatulas and knives). Just a small amount of an allergen splattering into an otherwise safe food can cause a reaction.

The term cross-contact is fairly new and is sometimes used interchangeably with the term cross-contamination. See chart below to understand the difference.

Cross-Contact	Cross Contamination
Occurs when an allergen is unintentionally transferred from one food to another	Occurs when microorganisms like bacteria contaminate food
Can cause food allergy reactions	Can cause foodborne illnesses
Proper cooking does NOT reduce or eliminate the chances of a food allergy reaction	Proper cooking may reduce or eliminate the chances of foodborne illness

Understanding Labels

Manufacturers of packaged food products that contain a major food allergen (milk, wheat, egg, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, crustacean shellfish, and soy) are required by law to list that allergen on the product label. However, there are several ways the allergen can be listed, so read all product labels carefully, including the full ingredient list. Additionally, common allergens can have other names. For example, whey and casein are milk-containing ingredients. *Tips for Avoiding Your Allergens* (foodallergy.org/tips-avoiding-allergen) can help you navigate labels.



Tips for Avoiding Your Allergen

- All FDA-regulated manufactured food products that contain a “major food allergen” (milk, wheat, egg, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, crustacean shellfish, and soy) as an ingredient are required by U.S. law to list that allergen on the product label. For tree nuts, fish and crustacean shellfish, the specific type of nut or fish must be listed.
- Read all product labels carefully before purchasing and consuming any item.
- Be aware of unexpected sources of allergens, such as the ingredients listed below.
- *Note: This list does not imply that the allergen is always present in these foods; it is intended to serve as a reminder to always read the label and ask questions about ingredients.



For a Milk-Free Diet

Avoid foods that contain milk or any of these ingredients:

butter, butter fat, butter oil, butter acid, butter ester(s)	lactalbumin, phosphate	<i>solids, whole</i>
butter milk	lactoferrin	milk protein hydrolysate
casein	lactose	pudding
casein hydrolysate	lactulose	Recaldent®
caseinates (<i>in all forms</i>)	milk (<i>in all forms, including condensed, cottage cheese</i>)	rennet casein
cheese	<i>including condensed, evaporated, goat's milk and milk from other animals, lowfat, malted, milkfat, nonfat, powder, protein, skimmed,</i>	sour cream, sour cream solids
cottage cheese		sour milk solids
cream		tagatose
curds		whey (<i>in all forms</i>)
custard		whey protein
diacetyl		hydrolysate
ghee		yogurt
half-and-half		

Milk is sometimes found in the following:

artificial butter flavor	culture and other bacterial cultures	nisin
baked goods	luncheon meat, hot dogs, sausages	non dairy products
caramel candies	margarine	nougat
chocolate		
lactic acid starter		

Keep the following in mind:

- Individuals who are allergic to cow's milk are often advised to also avoid milk from other domestic animals. For example, goat's milk protein is similar to cow's milk protein and may, therefore, cause a reaction in individuals who have a milk allergy.



For a Wheat-Free Diet

Avoid foods that contain wheat or any of these ingredients:

bread crumbs	<i>protein, instant, pastry, self-rising, soft wheat, steel ground, stone ground, whole wheat</i>	semolina
bulgur		spelt
cereal extract		sprouted wheat
club wheat		triticale
couscous		vital wheat gluten
cracker meal	hydrolyzed wheat protein	wheat (<i>bran, durum, germ, gluten, grass, malt, sprouts, starch</i>)
durum	Kamut®	wheat bran hydrolysate
einkorn	matzoh, matzoh meal (<i>also spelled as matzo, matzah, or matza</i>)	wheat germ oil
emmer	pasta	wheat grass
farina	seitan	wheat protein isolate
flour (<i>all purpose, bread, cake, durum, enriched, graham, high gluten, high</i>)		whole wheat berries

Wheat is sometimes found in the following:

glucose syrup	soy sauce	surimi
oats	starch (<i>gelatinized starch, modified starch, modified food starch, vegetable starch</i>)	



For an Egg-Free Diet

Avoid foods that contain eggs or any of these ingredients:

albumin (<i>also spelled albumen</i>)	livetin	vitellin
egg (<i>dried, powdered, solids, white, yolk</i>)	lysozyme	words starting with “ovo” or “ova” (<i>such as ovalbumin</i>)
egg nog	mayonnaise	
glutobulin	meringue (<i>meringue powder</i>)	
	surimi	

Egg is sometimes found in the following:

baked goods	fried rice	meatloaf or meatballs
breaded items	ice cream	nougat
drink foam (<i>alcoholic, specialty coffee</i>)	lecithin	pasta
egg substitutes	marzipan	
	marshmallows	

Keep the following in mind:

- Individuals with egg allergy should also avoid eggs from duck, turkey, goose, quail, etc., as these are known to be cross-reactive with chicken egg.
- While the whites of an egg contain the allergenic proteins, patients with an egg allergy must avoid all eggs completely.



For a Soy-Free Diet

Avoid foods that contain soy or any of these ingredients:

edamame	soy protein (<i>concentrate, hydrolyzed, isolate</i>)
miso	shoyu
natto	soy sauce
soy (<i>soy albumin, soy cheese, soy fiber, soy flour, soy grits, soy ice cream, soy milk, soy nuts, soy sprouts, soy yogurt</i>)	tamari
soya	tempeh
soybean (<i>curd, granules</i>)	textured vegetable protein (TVP)
	tofu

Soy is sometimes found in the following:

Asian cuisine	vegetable gum
vegetable broth	vegetable starch

Keep the following in mind:

- The FDA exempts highly refined soybean oil from being labeled as an allergen. Studies show most allergic individuals can safely eat soy oil that has been highly refined (not cold pressed, expeller pressed, or extruded soybean oil).
- Most individuals allergic to soy can safely eat soy lecithin.
- Follow your doctor's advice regarding these ingredients.





For a Shellfish-Free Diet

Avoid foods that contain shellfish or any of these ingredients:

barnacle	lobster (<i>langouste</i> , <i>langoustine</i> , <i>Moreton</i> <i>bay bugs</i> , <i>scampi</i> , <i>tomalley</i>)	prawns shrimp (<i>crevette</i> , <i>scampi</i>)
crab		
crawfish (<i>crawdad</i> , <i>crayfish</i> , <i>ecrevisse</i>)		
krill		

! Mollusks are not considered major allergens under food labeling laws and may not be fully disclosed on a product label.

Your doctor may advise you to avoid mollusks or these ingredients:

abalone	limpet (<i>lapas</i> , <i>opihi</i>)	sea cucumber
clams (<i>cherrystone</i> , <i>geoduck</i> , <i>littleneck</i> , <i>pismo</i> , <i>quahog</i>)	mussels	sea urchin
cockle	octopus	snails (<i>escargot</i>)
cuttlefish	oysters	squid (<i>calamari</i>)
	periwinkle	whelk (<i>Turban shell</i>)
	scallops	

Shellfish are sometimes found in the following:

bouillabaisse	fish stock	surimi
cuttlefish ink	seafood flavoring (e.g., <i>crab or clam extract</i>)	
glucosamine		

Keep the following in mind:

- Any food served in a seafood restaurant may contain shellfish protein due to cross-contact.
- For some individuals, a reaction may occur from inhaling cooking vapors or from handling fish or shellfish.



For a Peanut-Free Diet

Avoid foods that contain peanuts or any of these ingredients:

artificial nuts	goobers	nut meat
beer nuts	ground nuts	peanut butter
cold pressed, expeller pressed, or extruded peanut oil	mixed nuts	peanut flour
	monkey nuts	peanut protein
	nut pieces	hydrolysate

Peanut is sometimes found in the following:

African, Asian (especially <i>Chinese</i> , <i>Indian</i> , <i>Indonesian</i> , <i>Thai</i> , and <i>Vietnamese</i>), and Mexican dishes	baked goods (e.g., <i>pastries</i> , <i>cookies</i>) candy (including <i>chocolate candy</i>) chili egg rolls	enchilada sauce marzipan mole sauce nougat
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Keep the following in mind:

- Mandelonas are peanuts soaked in almond flavoring.
- The FDA exempts highly refined peanut oil from being labeled as an allergen. Studies show that most allergic individuals can safely eat peanut oil that has been highly refined (not cold pressed, expeller pressed, or extruded peanut oil). Follow your doctor's advice.
- A study showed that unlike other legumes, there is a strong possibility of cross-reaction between peanuts and lupine.
- Arachis oil is peanut oil.
- Many experts advise patients allergic to peanuts to avoid tree nuts as well.
- Sunflower seeds are often produced on equipment shared with peanuts.
- Some alternative nut butters, such as soy nut butter or sunflower seed butter, are produced on equipment shared with other tree nuts and, in some cases, peanuts. Contact the manufacturer before eating these products.



For a Tree-Nut-Free Diet

Avoid foods that contain nuts or any of these ingredients:

almond	hickory nut	nut pieces
artificial nuts	litchi/lychee/lychee nut	pecan
beechnut	macadamia nut	pesto
Brazil nut	marzipan/almond paste	pili nut
butternut	Nangai nut	pine nut (<i>also referred</i> <i>to as Indian</i> , <i>pignoli</i> , <i>pignolia</i> , <i>pignon</i> , <i>piñon</i> , and <i>pinyon</i> <i>nut</i>)
cashew	natural nut extract (e.g., <i>almond</i> , <i>walnut</i>)	nut butters (e.g., <i>cashew butter</i>)
chestnut	nut meal	nut meat
chinquapin nut	nut meat	nut paste (e.g., <i>almond</i> <i>paste</i>)
coconut*	nut meal	
filbert/hazelnut	nut meat	
gianduja (<i>a chocolate-</i> <i>nut mixture</i>)	nut paste (e.g., <i>almond</i> <i>paste</i>)	
ginkgo nut		

Tree nuts are sometimes found in the following:

black walnut hull extract (<i>flavoring</i>)	nut distillates/alcoholic extracts	walnut hull extract (<i>flavoring</i>)
natural nut extract	nut oils (e.g., <i>walnut</i> <i>oil</i> , <i>almond oil</i>)	

Keep the following in mind:

- Mortadella may contain pistachios.
- There is no evidence that coconut oil and shea nut oil/butter are allergenic.
- Many experts advise patients allergic to tree nuts to avoid peanuts as well.
- Talk to your doctor if you find other nuts not listed here.

* Coconut, the seed of a drupaceous fruit, has typically not been restricted in the diets of people with tree nut allergy. However, in October of 2006, the FDA began identifying coconut as a tree nut. Medical literature documents a small number of allergic reactions to coconut; most occurred in people who were not allergic to other tree nuts. Ask your doctor if you need to avoid coconut.



For a Fish-Free Diet

Fish is sometimes found in the following:

barbecue sauce	fish oil	pizza (<i>anchovy topping</i>)
bouillabaisse	fish sauce imitation fish or shellfish isinglass	roe
Caesar salad	lutefisk maw, maws (<i>fish maw</i>)	salad dressing
caviar	fish stock	seafood flavoring
deep fried items	fish flour	shark cartilage
fish flavoring	fish fume	shark fin
fish flour	fish gelatin (<i>kosher</i> <i>gelatin</i> , <i>marine</i> <i>gelatin</i>)	surimi
fish fume		sushi, sashimi
fish gelatin (<i>kosher</i> <i>gelatin</i> , <i>marine</i> <i>gelatin</i>)		Worcestershire sauce

Keep the following in mind:

- If you have fish allergy, avoid seafood restaurants. Even if you order a non-fish item off of the menu, cross-contact of fish protein is possible.
- Asian cookery often uses fish sauce as a flavoring base. Exercise caution when eating this type of cuisine.
- Fish protein can become airborne in the steam released during cooking and may cause an allergic reaction. Stay away from cooking areas when fish is being prepared.





How to Avoid Cross-Contact

What is cross-contact?

Cross-contact happens when one food comes into contact with another food and their proteins mix. As a result, each food then contains small amounts of the other food. These amounts are so small that they usually can't be seen.

Even this tiny amount of food protein has caused reactions in people with food allergies!

The term "cross-contact" is fairly new. Some people may call this "cross-contamination."

Why don't we use the term cross-contamination?

Cross-contamination usually refers to bacteria or viruses that get on food and make it unsafe to eat. In cross-contamination, cooking the food will lower the chance of a person getting sick.

This is not the same with food allergies and cross-contact. Cooking does not remove an allergen from a food!

The only way to stop you from having a reaction is to avoid the food and carefully clean anything that came in contact with it using soap and water.

Examples of cross-contact

Direct Cross-Contact (allergen was directly applied and then removed)	Indirect Cross-Contact (allergen was not directly applied)
Peeling cheese off a cheeseburger to make it a hamburger	Using the same spatula that flipped a cheeseburger to flip a hamburger
Removing shrimp from a salad	Not washing hands after handling shrimp before making the next salad
Scraping peanut butter off a piece of bread and using it to make a different sandwich	Wiping off—not properly cleaning—a knife used to spread peanut butter before using it to spread jelly

Tips to avoid cross-contact

- Use utensils, cutting boards and pans that have been thoroughly washed with soap and water. Consider using separate utensils and dishes for making and serving safe foods. Some families choose a different color to identify the safe kitchen tools.
- If you are making several foods, cook the allergy-safe foods first.
- Keep the safe foods covered and away from other foods that may splatter.
- If you make a mistake, you can't just remove an allergen from a meal. Even a small amount of cross-contact makes a food unsafe.
- Wash your hands with soap and water before touching anything else if you have handled a food allergen. Soap and water or commercial wipes will remove a food allergen. Sanitizing gels or water alone will not remove an allergen.
- Scrub down counters and tables with soap and water after making meals.
- Do not share food, drinks or utensils. Teach children not to share these when they are at school or with friends.



Substitutions for Common Allergens

Having a food allergy doesn't always mean you have to give up your favorite meals. There are many options for replacing an allergen with a safe ingredient. Below are some substitutions for common allergens. When preparing meals for someone with multiple food allergies, be mindful not to replace one allergen with another. *Always read labels and contact the manufacturer with questions.*

Milk: When baking, look for a substitute with high fat and protein to achieve similar results as cow's milk. Try to choose "enriched" or "fortified" versions, as this indicates that calcium and vitamin D have been added.

Milk substitutes are not created equal. Research indicates soy milk is the most nutritious option since it provides almost as much protein, vitamin D and calcium as regular milk. Rice, cashew and almond milk are low in protein and fat but provide comparable amounts of calcium and vitamin D. Rice, almond, coconut, cashew, hemp, pea, and soy milk substitutes often work well for cooking and baking.

Note that there is a difference between coconut milk beverages and canned coconut milk. Refrigerated coconut beverages work well in smoothies, over cereal and in coffee. Canned coconut milk works well in soups and sauces and can be made into whipped cream for desserts.

Avoid using infant formula for cooking and baking because heating it to a high temperature can destroy the nutritional quality and may have an adverse effect on flavor. If your allergy allows you to, try to use several different kinds of milk for best nutritional results

Butter: Milk-free margarine and soy butter are common substitutes. For best results when baking with margarine, look for one with low-water content. Margarine sticks usually have less water than tub margarine.

Yogurt: Soy, coconut, almond, cashew, and pea-based yogurts are good alternatives to milk-based versions. Look for yogurt that has calcium added. Soy yogurt provides a good source of protein and overall is most similar to milk-based yogurt.

Cheese: Vegan or veggie cheese can be made of several different ingredients, some of which include common allergens, including milk and tree nuts, so always read labels and contact the manufacturer with questions.

Eggs: For baking, you can use one of the following methods (per egg called for in recipe):

- One-quarter cup of unsweetened applesauce with one-half teaspoon of baking powder
- One-quarter cup of mashed banana (there may be a slight banana flavor)
- One tablespoon of ground flax seeds with three tablespoons of water; mix until water is fully absorbed
- Two tablespoons of water with one tablespoon of oil (vegetable or corn oil works best) and two teaspoons of baking powder

There are also powdered egg replacers that are free of the top eight allergens at most grocery stores.

Wheat: There are many wheat-free grains available, such as rice, corn, millet, potato, tapioca, and quinoa. Many of these grains are also made into wheat-free flours. You can find a number of gluten-free flours that can be used cup for cup for wheat flour.

One recipe for making your own wheat-free flour is to mix four cups superfine brown rice flour, one and one-third cups potato starch (not flour) and two-thirds of a cup of tapioca flour (sometimes called tapioca starch).

Peanut butter: Sunflower seed butter, soy butter, pea butter, and tahini (made from sesame) are common substitutes. Tree nut butters, such as almond or cashew butter, can be used by individuals who do not have a tree nut allergy. *Note that tree nut butters can be produced on equipment shared with other tree nuts and, in some cases, peanuts. Contact the manufacturer before eating these products.*

