

Food Allergies

Pre-reading



Questions: What do you know about the subject? What questions do you have about it?

Definitions: Hives – a painful skin condition in which red, itchy patches or bumps form on the skin

Immune system – a system within the body that seeks and kills potentially harmful substances

Eczema – an inflammation of the skin that results in red, itchy, scaly skin

Constrict – to tighten; to make smaller or narrower

Reading

Imagine what it would be like if eating a peanut butter sandwich or shrimp left you vomiting or gasping for breath. How about drinking a tall glass of milk and becoming overcome with itchy hives on your body? For some people with food allergies, this is a reality.

A food allergy is an abnormal response to food triggered by the immune system. It is not the bloating or gas that some people get from certain foods; that is food intolerance. Currently, about 1.5 percent of adults and up to 6 percent of children younger than 3 years in the United States (about 14 million people) have a true food allergy. Experts predict that number will rise. Those more likely to develop food allergies come from families in which allergies such as hay fever, asthma, or eczema are common.

It is critical for people who have food allergies to identify them and to avoid foods that cause allergic reactions. Some foods can cause severe illness. In some cases, a reaction can constrict airways in the lungs. It can severely lower blood pressure and cause suffocation by the swelling of the tongue or throat. An estimated 150 Americans die each year from severe allergic reactions to food.

The timing and location of an allergic reaction to food is affected by digestion. An allergic person may first experience a severe itching of the tongue, or “tingling lips.” Vomiting, cramps or diarrhea may follow. Later, as the allergens enter the bloodstream and travel through the body, there may be a drop in blood pressure, hives, or eczema. The onset of these symptoms may vary from a few minutes to an hour or two after the food is eaten.

Food allergy patterns in adults differ somewhat from those in children. The most common foods to cause allergies in adults are shrimp, lobster, crab, and other shellfish; peanuts; walnuts and other tree nuts; fish; and eggs.

In children, eggs, milk, peanuts, soy and wheat are the main culprits. Children typically outgrow their allergies to milk, egg, soy and wheat. Allergies to peanut, tree nuts, fish and shrimp usually are not outgrown. Adults usually do not lose their allergies.

The best way to treat food allergies is to avoid the foods that trigger reactions. Those with severe food allergies are advised to wear medical alert bracelets or necklaces.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s *Food Allergies: When Food Becomes the Enemy*

Level 7.0

Understanding

1. What is a food allergy? _____

2. How can it dangerous? _____

3. Why does the onset of reaction to certain foods vary so much in terms of time? _____

4. What are some of the possible reactions? _____

5. Who is most likely to have food allergies? _____

6. How can a food allergy be treated? _____

7. What are some of the most common foods that cause allergic reactions? _____

Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Do you or someone you know have food allergies? Has it been diagnosed? If yes, how was it diagnosed? What kinds of reactions are experienced? What foods cause the reactions?
