



## FACTS ABOUT FOOD ALLERGIES

More than 11 million Americans suffer from food allergies of varying degrees of severity—at least 6% of children under age 3 and 3-4% of the adult population. Over the past 10 years, the incidence of food allergies in the U.S. has been increasing, particularly in children. There is no cure, and no treatment that can prevent anaphylaxis, a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction—only emergency treatment to control a reaction that is already in progress.

### Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis

- A food allergy develops when the body's immune system becomes misdirected and attacks normally harmless food proteins.
- Although any food can cause an allergy, eight foods cause 90% of all reactions: peanut, tree nuts (almonds, walnuts, cashews, pistachios, pecans, etc.), egg, milk, fish, shellfish, soy, and wheat.
- The only way to prevent an allergic reaction is strict avoidance of the food that causes the allergy.
- Anaphylaxis is a sudden, severe, and potentially fatal allergic reaction to a food. Food allergies are the single leading cause of anaphylaxis outside of the hospital setting.
- Even a tiny trace of the wrong food can trigger an anaphylactic reaction. People with food allergies must always be vigilant, since dangerous trace amounts of the problem food may be found in poorly labeled processed foods, on cross-contaminated utensils or manufacturing equipment—even carried on another person's hands or transmitted through a kiss.
- The foods that most commonly cause anaphylaxis are peanut, tree nuts, and seafood.
- Every year, at least 150 people die from anaphylaxis, and food allergic reactions account for over 30,000 emergency room visits.
- Epinephrine (adrenaline) is the key medication that reverses the symptoms of anaphylaxis. People at risk should always wear a MedicAlert® bracelet and carry self-injectable epinephrine (EpiPen® or Twinject®). Available by prescription, epinephrine must be given as soon as possible to hold off symptoms, buying time to get to an emergency room for more care.

### Who Gets Food Allergies

- Food allergies affect children and adults of all races and ethnicity, and can develop at any age.
- Children of parents with any type of allergic disease (eczema, asthma, environmental allergies or food allergies) are particularly at risk.
- More than 6.5 million Americans are allergic to seafood and over 3 million are allergic to peanuts and tree nuts.
- The number of children with peanut allergies *doubled* from 1997-2002. Teens and young adults with peanut or tree nut allergy appear to be at an increased risk for severe allergic reactions.
- Food allergy can be responsible for chronic diseases, such as eczema, and can stunt growth in infants and children by damaging the digestive system.
- Since 1960, the odds of suffering from a food allergy have grown from 1 in every 100 children to 1 in every 20—thus, there is likely to be a food allergic child in every classroom in the U.S.

### Research

- Researchers are seeking better treatments and a cure for food allergy. Among the promising treatments under study are new kinds of immunotherapy; a peanut allergy vaccine that could become the prototype for other food allergy vaccines; and a Chinese herbal therapy that would protect people with peanut allergies from anaphylaxis.