

Food Reactions & Asthma

This factfile covers:

- What is a food allergy?
- Which foods trigger allergic reactions?
- Which foods also affect asthma?
- How are food allergies diagnosed and treated?
- Where can I get more information?

Although unpleasant reactions to food are common, true food allergies are not.

Food and drink are not common triggers for people with asthma.

What is a food allergy?

- An allergic reaction occurs when the body's immune system reacts abnormally to a harmless substance, such as food.
- Symptoms of food allergies can vary widely. You may get symptoms in your mouth (swelling or tingling), gut (vomiting, diarrhoea), skin (rash, swelling of face) or in your chest (wheezing, shortness of breath).
- Your asthma may flare up.

Which foods trigger allergic reactions?

- Foods that can trigger asthma by way of an allergic reaction include peanuts, nuts, sesame, fish, shellfish, dairy products and eggs.
- Some people become wheezy when they eat food containing certain additives
 - The dye tartrazine (E102) is found in many foods and also in several medicines. People whose asthma is triggered by tartrazine may also react to aspirin.
 - The preservative benzoic acid (E210) found in fruit products and soft drinks can also be a trigger.
 - Some foods and wine contain histamine or similar chemicals called vasoactive amines that can trigger asthma.

Which foods also affect asthma?

- Sodium metabisulphite (E220–227) may also trigger asthma, but not via an allergic reaction. It can be found in wine, home-brewed beer, fizzy drinks, prepared meats and prepared salads.

How are food allergies diagnosed and treated?

- If you feel you or your child has a food allergy then you should contact your doctor. They may refer you to a specialist or an allergy clinic for testing.
- There is no reliable medicine for food allergies. The only treatment is avoiding the offending food.