



# Sesame

## Seeds

*One of the nine most  
common food allergens*



## Allergic reactions

**Severe allergic reactions (e.g. anaphylactic reaction) occur when the body's immune system strongly reacts to a particular allergen protein or irritant. These reactions may be caused by food, insect stings and medications. In Canada, the nine priority food allergens are peanuts, tree nuts, sesame seeds, milk, eggs, fish (including crustaceans and shellfish), soy, wheat and sulphites.**

### **What are the symptoms of an allergic reaction?**

When someone comes in contact with an allergen, the symptoms of a reaction may develop quickly and rapidly progress from mild to severe. The most dangerous symptoms include breathing difficulties, a drop in blood pressure or shock, which may result in loss of consciousness and even death. Severe allergic reactions can occur quickly and without warning. A person experiencing an allergic reaction may have **any** of the following symptoms:

- Flushed face, hives or a rash, red and itchy skin
- Swelling of the eyes, face, lips, throat and tongue
- Trouble breathing, speaking or swallowing
- Anxiousness, distress, faintness, paleness, sense of doom, weakness
- Cramps, diarrhea, vomiting
- A drop in blood pressure, rapid heart beat, loss of consciousness

### **How are food allergies and severe food allergy reactions treated?**

Currently there is no cure for food allergies. The only option is complete avoidance of the specific allergen. Appropriate emergency treatment for a severe food allergy reaction includes an injection of epinephrine (adrenalin), which is available in an auto-injector, such as an EpiPen<sup>®</sup>. Adrenalin must be administered as soon as symptoms of a severe allergic reaction appear. The injection is followed by further treatment and observation in a hospital emergency room. If your allergist has diagnosed you with a food allergy and prescribed epinephrine, carry it with you all the time and know how to use it. Follow your allergist's advice on how to use an EpiPen<sup>®</sup>.

## Frequently asked questions about sesame seed allergies

### **I have a sesame seed allergy. How can I avoid a sesame seed-related reaction?**

Avoid all food and products that contain sesame seeds and sesame derivatives, including any product whose ingredient list warns it “may contain” sesame.

### **How can I determine if a product contains sesame seeds or sesame derivatives?**

Always read the ingredient list carefully. Sesame seeds and sesame derivatives can often be present under different names, e.g., tahini. Do not forget that cross-contamination, e.g., using the same cutting board that was just used to cut sesame seed buns, can also be a potential source of the allergen.

### **What do I do if I am not sure whether a product contains sesame seeds or sesame derivatives?**

If you have a sesame seed allergy, do not eat or use the product. Get ingredient information from the manufacturer.

*Do not forget that cross-contamination, e.g., using the same cutting board that was just used to cut sesame seed buns, can also be a potential source of the allergen.*



## Avoiding sesame seeds and sesame derivatives

Make sure you read product labels carefully to avoid products that contain sesame seeds and sesame derivatives. Always ask questions about food preparation, ingredients and the possibility of cross-contamination when eating out and buying food from retail food outlets, e.g., in-store bakeries, shopping centre food outlets. Avoid food and products that do not have an ingredient list and read labels **every time** you shop. Manufacturers may occasionally change their recipes or use different ingredients for varieties of the same brand. Refer to the following list before shopping:

### **Other names for sesame seeds**

Benne/benne seed/benniseed  
Gingelly/Gingilly Oil  
Seeds  
Sesamol/sesamolina  
Sesamum indicum  
Sim Sim  
Tahina  
Tahini  
Til  
Vegetable Oil

*Avoid food and products that do not have an ingredient list and read labels every time you shop. Manufacturers may occasionally change their recipes or use different ingredients for varieties of the same brand.*

## Possible sources of sesame seeds

Aqua Libra® (herbal drink)  
Baked goods, e.g., breads, cookies, pastries  
Bread crumbs, bread sticks, cereals, crackers, melba toast, muesli  
Cross-contamination, e.g., barbecue grills, caraway/poppy seeds, containers, utensils  
Dips, pâtés, spreads, e.g., hummus, chutney  
Dressings, gravies, marinades, salads, sauces, soups  
Ethnic foods, e.g., flavoured rice, noodles, shish kebabs, stews, stir fry  
Flavour(ing)  
Herbs, seasoning, spice  
Margarine  
Processed meats, sausages  
Risotto (rice dish)  
Sesame oil  
Snack foods, e.g., bagel/pita chips, candy, granola bars, halvah, pretzels, rice cakes, sesame snap bars  
Tahini  
Tempeh  
Vegetarian Burgers

### Non-food sources of sesame seeds

Adhesive bandages  
Cosmetics, hair care products, perfumes, soaps, sun screens  
Drugs  
Fungicides, insecticides  
Lubricants, ointments, topical oils  
Pet food  
Sesame meal, e.g., poultry and livestock feed

*Note: These lists are not complete and may change. Food and food products purchased from other countries, through mail-order or the Internet, are not always produced using the same manufacturing and labelling standards as in Canada.*

## What can I do?

### Be informed

See an allergist and educate yourself about food allergies.  
Contact your local allergy association for further information.

If you or anyone you know has food allergies or would like to receive information about food being recalled, sign up for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) free e-mail "Allergy Alerts and Food Recalls" subscription service available at [www.inspection.gc.ca](http://www.inspection.gc.ca). When you sign up you will automatically receive food recall public warnings.

### Before eating

Allergists recommend that if you do not have your EpiPen® with you, that you not eat. If an ingredient list says a product "may contain" or "does contain" sesame seeds or sesame derivatives, do not eat. If you do not recognize an ingredient or there is no ingredient list available, avoid the product.

*Allergists recommend that if you do not have your EpiPen® with you, that you not eat.*



## What is the Government of Canada doing about food allergens?

The Government of Canada is committed to providing safe food to all Canadians. The CFIA and Health Canada work closely with municipal, provincial and territorial partners and industry to meet this goal.

The CFIA enforces Canada's labelling laws and works with associations, distributors, food manufacturers and importers to ensure complete and appropriate labelling of all foods. The CFIA recommends that food companies establish effective allergen controls to minimize the potential for allergic reactions. When the CFIA becomes aware of a potential serious hazard associated with a food, such as undeclared allergens, the food product is recalled from the marketplace and a public warning is issued.

The *Food and Drug Regulations* require that most pre-packaged foods carry a label and that their ingredients appear in a list in decreasing order of proportion. However, they do not currently require components (e.g. ingredients of ingredients) of certain foods and products, such as flavouring, seasoning, spices and vinegar, to be listed on food labels.

Health Canada has worked with the medical community, consumer associations, and the food industry to enhance labelling requirements for priority allergens, gluten sources and sulphite in pre-packaged foods sold in Canada. These regulations would require that the most common food and food ingredients that cause life-threatening or severe allergic reactions are always identified by their common names that consumers can easily recognize on food labels.

*When the CFIA becomes aware of a potential serious hazard associated with a food, such as undeclared allergens, the food product is recalled from the marketplace and a public warning is issued.*

## Where can I get more information?

For more information on food allergies and to subscribe to the free "Allergy Alerts and Food Recalls" e-mail subscription service, contact the CFIA at **[www.inspection.gc.ca](http://www.inspection.gc.ca)** or **1 800 442-2342** (8:00 am to 4:00 pm local time – Monday to Friday).

For information on this and other Government of Canada programs and services call **1 800 O-Canada** (**1 800 622-6232**) **TTY 1 800 465-7735**

Below are some of the organizations that can provide additional allergy information:

Allergy/Asthma Information Association **[www.aaia.ca](http://www.aaia.ca)** (English only)  
Anaphylaxis Canada **[www.anaphylaxis.ca](http://www.anaphylaxis.ca)** (English only)  
Association Québécoise Des Allergies Alimentaires **[www.aqaa.qc.ca](http://www.aqaa.qc.ca)** (French only)  
Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology **[www.csaci.medical.org](http://www.csaci.medical.org)** (English only)  
Health Canada **[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)**

*Developed in consultation with the Allergy/Asthma Information Association, Anaphylaxis Canada, Association Québécoise Des Allergies Alimentaires, the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology and Health Canada.*