



Wheat

A priority
food allergen
2016



Allergic reactions are severe adverse reactions that occur when the body's immune system overreacts to a particular allergen. These reactions may be caused by food, insect stings, latex, medications and other substances. In Canada, the priority food allergens are peanuts, tree nuts (almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachio nuts and walnuts), sesame seeds, milk, eggs, seafood (fish, crustaceans and shellfish), soy, wheat, triticale, and mustard. Sulphites (a food additive), which do not cause true allergic reactions, are generally grouped with the priority allergens because sulphite-sensitive individuals may react to sulphites with allergy-like symptoms.

What are the symptoms of an allergic or allergic-type reaction?

When someone comes in contact with a food allergen or added sulphites, the symptoms of an allergic or allergic-type reaction may develop quickly and rapidly progress from mild to severe. The most severe form of an allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis. Symptoms can include breathing difficulties, a drop in blood pressure or shock, which may result in loss of consciousness and even death. 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
- Anxiety, distress, faintness, paleness, sense of doom, weakness
- Cramps, diarrhea, vomiting
- A drop in blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, loss of consciousness

How are severe allergic reactions treated?

Currently there is no cure for food allergies. The only option for managing the risk is to completely avoid the specific priority allergen. Appropriate emergency treatment for anaphylaxis (a severe allergic reaction) includes an injection of epinephrine, which is available in an auto-injector device. Epinephrine must be administered as soon as symptoms of a severe allergic reaction appear. The injection must be 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 auto-injector device.

Frequently asked questions about wheat allergies

I have a wheat allergy. How can I avoid a wheat-related reaction?

Avoid all food and products that contain wheat and wheat derivatives which contain wheat protein. These include any product whose label carries a precautionary statement warning that the product "may contain" or "may contain traces of" wheat.

What is the difference between a wheat allergy and celiac disease?

Wheat allergy and celiac disease are two different conditions. When someone has a wheat allergy his/her immune system has an abnormal reaction to proteins from wheat, with acute symptoms and potential severity similar to that of other allergic food reactions. When a person with celiac disease eats food containing the protein gluten (found in wheat and some other grains) it damages the lining of the small intestine, which stops the body from absorbing nutrients. This can lead to diarrhea, weight loss and eventually malnutrition. If you are unsure whether you have a wheat allergy or celiac disease, consult an allergist or a physician.

How can I determine if a product contains wheat or wheat derivatives?

Always read the ingredient list carefully and look for any precautionary statements. If wheat is part of the product formulation, it must be declared in the list of ingredients or in a separate "contains:" statement immediately following the list of ingredients.

Can a wheat allergy be outgrown?

A wheat allergy develops most commonly in infants and tends to disappear within five years. Adults who develop a wheat allergy, however, are likely to retain it. Consult your allergist before reintroducing your child to wheat products.

What about exercise and wheat allergy?

A rare and poorly understood condition known as food-dependent, exercise-induced anaphylaxis is most commonly linked to wheat, although other foods have also been known to trigger this condition. People with this condition can experience anaphylactic reactions when they exercise soon after eating a particular food allergen. They do not react, however, if they delay exercise by several hours.

What do I do if I am not sure whether a product contains wheat or wheat derivatives?

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

Does product size affect the likelihood of an allergic reaction?

Product size does not affect the likelihood of a reaction; however, the same brand of product may be safe to consume for one product size but not another. This is because product formulation may vary between different product sizes of the same product. **Always read the ingredient lists carefully.**

Avoiding wheat and wheat derivatives

Make sure you read product labels carefully to avoid products that contain wheat and wheat derivatives. 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 wheat

In the past, some products have used other names for wheat on their labels. These names are not permitted without the word wheat also appearing on the label, based on the enhanced labelling requirements for food allergens, gluten sources and added sulphites; however, if you have a wheat allergy and see one of the following in the list of ingredients on a product you should not eat it.

- | | | |
|------------|--|-------------------------|
| • Atta | • Flour | • Kamut |
| • Bulgur | • Farina | • Seitan |
| • Couscous | • Fu | • Semolina |
| • Durum | • Graham, high-gluten and high-protein flour | • Spelt (dinkel, farro) |
| • Einkorn | | |
| • Emmer | | |

Triticale is a cross between wheat and rye. If you are allergic to wheat do not consume products which are made with triticale.

Examples of foods and products that contain or often contain wheat

- Breads and baked goods
- Baking mixes, powder and flour
- Batter-fried foods
- Beer (due to the absence of ingredient list in standardized beer, the presence of wheat does not have to be labeled in beers)
- Cereal-based coffee substitutes (chicory, barley)
- Chicken and beef broth (cans and bouillon cubes)
- Falafel
- Flour
- Gluten
- Host (communion, altar bread and wafers)
- Hydrolyzed plant protein
- Imitation bacon
- Pie fillings and puddings
- Sauces, for example, chutney, soy and tamari sauce
- Seasonings

Avoid food and products that do not have an ingredient list and read labels every time you shop.

Other possible sources of wheat

- Deli meats, hot dogs and surimi
- Gelatinized starch, modified starch and food starch
- Ice cream
- Prepared ketchup and mustard
- Salad dressings
- Snack foods, for example, crackers, cereal

Non-food sources of wheat

- Cosmetics and hair-care products
- Medications and vitamins
- Modeling compound for example, PLAY-DOH
- Pet food
- Wreath decorations

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

Consult your doctor or an allergist in order to obtain the advice and support needed to help manage your condition. Contact your local allergy association for further information.

If you or anyone you know has food allergies or sensitivities and would like to receive information about food being recalled due to improper allergen labelling, sign up for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) free e-mail "Food Recalls and Allergy Alerts" notification service available at 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 auto-injector device with you that you **do not eat**. If the label indicates that a product "contains:" or "may contain:" wheat or wheat derivatives, do not eat it. If you do not recognize an ingredient or there is no ingredient list available, avoid the product.

Watch out for allergen cross contamination!

Cross contamination is the transfer of an ingredient (food allergen) to a product that does not normally have that ingredient in it. Through cross contamination, a food that should not contain the allergen could become dangerous to eat for those who are allergic.

Cross contamination can happen:

- during **food manufacturing** through shared production and packaging equipment;
- at **retail** through shared equipment, e.g., cheese and deli meats sliced on the same slicer; and through bulk display of food products, e.g., bins of baked goods, bulk nuts; and
- during **food preparation** at home or in restaurants through equipment, utensils and hands.



What is the Government of Canada doing about priority food allergens and added sulphites?

The Government of Canada is committed to providing Canadians with the information they need to make safe and healthy food choices. 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 prevent the occurrence of undeclared allergens and cross-contamination. The CFIA has developed guidelines and tools to aid them in developing these controls. When the CFIA becomes aware of a potential hazard associated with a food, such as undeclared allergens, Health Canada is asked to assess the situation. When a serious risk is identified, the food product is recalled from the marketplace and a public warning is issued. The CFIA has also published several advisories to industry and consumers regarding allergens in food.

Health Canada has worked with the medical community, consumer associations, and the food industry to enhance labelling regulations for food allergens, gluten sources and added sulphites in pre-packaged food sold in Canada. Health Canada has amended the *Food and Drug Regulations* to require that the most common foods and food ingredients that cause life-threatening or severe allergic reactions are always clearly identified by their common names on food labels allowing consumers to easily recognize them.

More information on the regulations that enhance the labelling of food allergens, gluten sources and added sulphites can be found on the Health Canada website at:

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/allergen/index-eng.php

If you come across a food that you think is improperly labelled, contact the CFIA and provide information about the product.

Report a food safety or labelling concern:

www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/reporte.shtml

Where can I get more information?

For more information on:

- food allergies

visit Health Canada's website at

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/allerg/fa-aa/index-eng.php

For information on:

- subscribing to the "Food Recalls and Allergy Alerts" e-mail notification service

visit the CFIA Website at **www.inspection.gc.ca**

or call **1-800-442-2342/TTY 1-800-465-7735**

(8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern 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 organizations that can provide additional allergy information:

- Allergy/Asthma Information Association
www.aia.ca/en/index.htm
- Food Allergy Canada **www.foodallergycanada.ca**
- Allergies Québec **www.allergies-alimentaires.org**
(French only)
- Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology
www.csaci.ca (English only)