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**You Asked: Food Allergies Explained**

**By News Canada**

**You Asked: Food Allergies Explained**

**by: News Canada**

(NC)–Life–threatening allergies (anaphylaxis) may affect more than 600,000 Canadians, a number that has increased dramatically in just one decade. Foods account for most cases of anaphylaxis in children, whereas drugs are more often the cause with increasing age. For potentially life–threatening reactions, injectable adrenaline, also known as epinephrine, should be administered rapidly, no matter how mild the early symptoms appear. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions on anaphylaxis:

**Q:** What are the triggers of anaphylaxis?

**A:** The most common causes in the North American population include foods, drugs, insect stings and natural latex rubber. Peanut is the food allergen most commonly associated with life–threatening reactions, but any food can trigger anaphylaxis in a sensitive individual.

**Q:** What is the difference between anaphylaxis and other allergic reactions?

**A:** While many of the initial symptoms of anaphylaxis may be similar to milder allergic reactions (itchy eyes, hives) anaphylaxis is characterized by involvement of more than one body system and, usually a rapid progression of symptoms that can lead to death. If there has been a past history of anaphylaxis, it is safest to assume that the reaction will again lead to anaphylaxis and give epinephrine at the earliest sign.

**Q:** What is the best plan–of–action in the event of anaphylaxis?

**A:** Learn as much as possible about recognizing the symptoms, how to be ready, and how to administer the medication with an auto–injector. Even when symptoms are mild, if you suspect your child was exposed to a trigger, it is important to immediately inject epinephrine, and then head straight to a medical facility. A dose of epinephrine lasts for only 10 to 20 minutes, so patients should carry a

## You Asked: Food Allergies Explained

separate dose for each 15 minutes of travel time to a medical facility, to be administered only if symptoms persist. Other precautions include: checking the expiry date on the medication, and for a change in its colour; making sure that your child care providers, teachers and other adults know about the child's allergy; wearing a Medic–Alert bracelet or necklace indicating the allergy; checking food labels carefully, and asking about menu ingredients at restaurants.

As part of a nationwide initiative to answer pressing questions on anaphylaxis, a special pharmacist–directed, HealthWatch for Children Day is planned at 800 Shoppers Drug Mart/Pharmaprix locations, on Thursday, Sept. 19. Just ask your HealthWatch pharmacist for an appointment. Or, if you miss this information day but have questions on allergies, be sure to direct them to your doctor, or to any HealthWatch pharmacist at Shoppers Drug Mart/Pharmaprix.

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### **Food Allergies**

**By Steve Wilcott**

An allergy can be described as a malfunction of the immune system, an exaggerated response to certain substances. Your body mistakenly believes that something it has touched, smelled or eaten is harmful to it and your body releases massive amounts of chemicals, such as histamine to protect itself.

It is believed that 11 million Americans suffer from food allergies. These allergies are as varied as food itself is. Some people suffer from an allergy to one food, some to many. The most common food allergies are generally eggs, milk, peanuts, tree nuts (such as walnuts), fish, shellfish, soy and wheat.

Symptoms of food allergies are varied and range from a tingling of the mouth to swelling of the tongue and throat to difficulty breathing to hives, cramps, diarrhea, vomiting and in some instances death.

## You Asked: Food Allergies Explained

There are ways to help you or your loved one manage your food allergies. First seek the help of an allergist. Your allergist will perform a patch test to determine the exact cause of allergic reactions. This will be the guideline you use as you develop a diet based around your food allergies.

As with other types of allergies there is no cure for a food allergy. Some children do grow out of some food allergies as they age although allergies to peanuts, fish, shellfish and nuts are often considered lifetime allergies. You or your loved one must simply avoid the food that causes the allergy. This can be difficult, especially when eating out in a restaurant. Depending on the severity of allergy, even slight cross contamination of food products can cause reactions.

Food labeling is a very important component of avoiding foods that trigger allergies. Since 2000 the FDA has been presenting information on allergy risks and labeling requirements to manufacturers. They seek to have manufacturers change some labels to be easier to read, using plain language like "milk" on a label instead of "caseinate".

In the case of a milk or egg allergy there are alternatives that can be used when cooking or baking. There are many online sites dedicated to supplying information, education and support to those with food allergies.

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