

# Your quick guide to food allergies and intolerances

A food allergy is caused when your immune system mistakenly thinks that certain foods are a threat to your body. A food intolerance doesn't usually involve your immune system, however, coeliac disease is an intolerance to gluten and does involve the immune system.

## Allergy facts

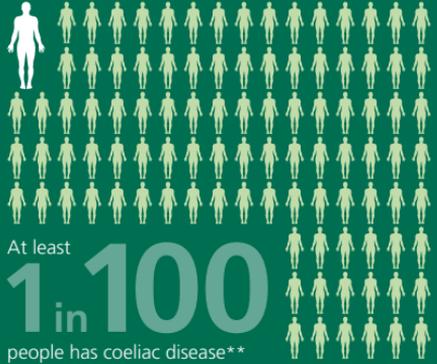
Between

**1-2%**  
of adults\*...



...and

**5-8%**  
of children in the UK  
have a food allergy\*



## What is a...

### Food allergy

Food allergic reactions range from **mild to very serious**. Symptoms can affect different areas of the body at the same time and can include **rashes, swelling, chest tightness and shortness of breath**. Serious cases can lead to anaphylaxis (a life-threatening reaction) and death.

### Food intolerance

Food intolerance can be caused by **difficulties digesting certain ingredients**, such as **lactose** from milk. Symptoms include **diarrhoea, bloating and stomach cramps** and usually only occur several hours after eating the food.

### Coeliac disease

Coeliac disease is caused by a **reaction of the immune system to gluten**. Symptoms include **bloating, diarrhoea, tiredness, mouth ulcers, anaemia, osteoporosis** and usually occur several hours after eating the food.

All types of food can cause a reaction. However, certain proteins are responsible for most food allergies and intolerances. The most common food allergies in children are caused by:



Milk



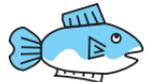
Eggs



Peanuts



Tree nuts



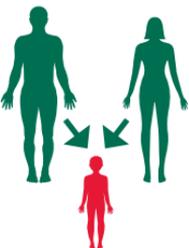
Fish



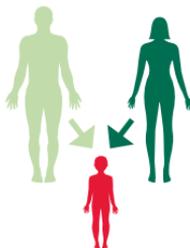
Hospital admissions due to food allergies in the UK increased by

**500%** between **1990** and **2007**\*\*\*

Odds that a child with **two allergic parents** will develop allergies:



Odds that a child with **one allergic parent** will develop allergies:

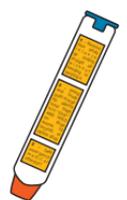


## Treatment

There is no cure for food allergies, food intolerance or coeliac disease. The only way to prevent a reaction is to avoid the foods that make you ill.



However if you have a mild or moderate food allergic reaction you can use **antihistamines** to relieve the symptoms. In case of a more serious reaction (including anaphylaxis), a medication called **adrenaline**, contained in an **auto-injector pen** can be used.



For more information, visit: [food.gov.uk/allergy](http://food.gov.uk/allergy) or [nhs.uk/conditions/allergies](http://nhs.uk/conditions/allergies)

✉ Sign up to our allergy alerts on [food.gov.uk/email](http://food.gov.uk/email), or follow **#AllergyAlert** on Twitter and Facebook

📘 Let's keep connected at [food.gov.uk/facebook](http://food.gov.uk/facebook)

🗣 Join our conversation [@food.gov.uk/twitter](https://twitter.com/foodgovuk)

📺 Watch us on [food.gov.uk/youtube](http://food.gov.uk/youtube)

### Sources:

\* FSA Report of 2008 T07 Food Allergy and Intolerance Research Programme Review – <http://multimedia.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/t07review2008.pdf>

\*\* Bingley, P. J. et al. (2004) Undiagnosed coeliac disease at age seven: population based prospective birth cohort study. *British Medical Journal* 7435 322-323

\*\*\* Gupta R, Sheikh A, Strachan DP, Anderson HR (2007). *Time Trends in Allergic Disorders in the UK*