



Food allergies and your baby

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is when your body's immune system negatively reacts—an allergic reaction—to the protein in a specific food. **This is different from a food intolerance.** A food intolerance affects your digestive system, not your immune system. This means they are usually less serious, even if you don't feel very good.

What are the most common foods that can cause an allergic reaction?

Almost any food can cause an allergic reaction. However, some foods cause allergic reactions more often than others. These are sometimes referred to as the “**Big 9**.”

- 1 **Cow's milk**
- 2 **Eggs**
- 3 **Fish**
- 4 **Shellfish (shrimp, crab, or lobster)**
- 5 **Tree nuts**
- 6 **Peanuts**
- 7 **Wheat**
- 8 **Soybeans (soy)**
- 9 **Sesame**

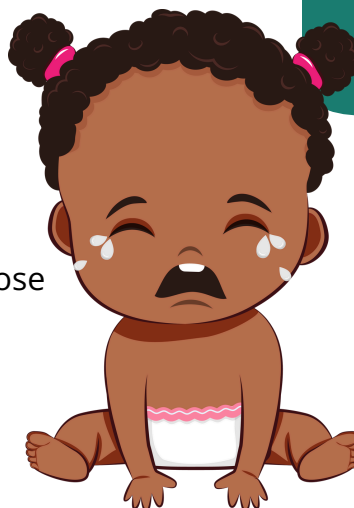
What are the signs of a food allergy?

There are many signs (symptoms) that show someone may have a food allergy. You may see these right after your baby eats a food, or up to 2 hours later. Some of the most common symptoms are:

Eyes—red, itchy, watery, swelling

Nose—sneezing, runny or blocked nose

Mouth and tongue—itchy, swelling



*Some symptoms are more serious than others. **Call 911 if it's hard for your baby to breathe, they have swelling on their face or lips, or they vomit or have diarrhea after they eat.**

Breathing—wheezing, coughing, difficulty breathing

Stomach—diarrhea, vomiting, cramps

Skin—red, itchy, hives

How can I prevent food allergies?

It's not possible to completely prevent food allergies. However, there are some things you can do to help reduce the risk—especially in children.

Food allergies are more common in babies who have **eczema** (a skin condition) or family members who have food allergies. Talk to your doctor about **when** and **how** to introduce the “Big 9” food allergens if your baby has eczema or family members with food allergies.



Introduce the “Big 9” early and often.

Introduce the 9 most common food allergens (the “Big 9”) to your baby when they're **4 to 6 months old**. This is when most babies are developmentally ready for solid foods. **Use softer forms of food during this stage**—like thinned peanut butter instead of whole nuts, or mashed wheat cereal instead of sliced bread. Your baby is less likely to choke if you introduce soft foods at this stage.



Wait until your baby is **12 months old** to:

- **Introduce honey**—on its own or in foods. Your baby is more likely to get sick from it before this age.
- **Replace breast milk or formula with cow's milk.** It is okay to offer small amounts of cheese, yogurt, or foods that have cow's milk in them (like soup or muffins) before they turn 1 year old.



Follow the 3-day rule.

Wait 3 to 5 days after you introduce a food to your baby before you introduce another new food. This gives you time to notice if your baby shows signs of an allergic reaction to each food. After you know your baby doesn't have an allergic reaction to a food, continue to offer it regularly.

Talk to your doctor.

Your doctor can help answer questions and give information that is specific to your situation.

References

1. Food allergies in babies and young children. NHS.
2. Food Allergies: The “Big 9”. USDA.
3. When, What, and How to Introduce Solid Foods. CDC.
4. Have Food Allergies? Read the Label. FDA
5. Avoiding Cross-Contact. FARE.