

What You Should Know About Living With Food Allergy

If you are reading this, chances are you have been diagnosed with a food allergy. As you may know, to successfully manage your food allergies, your diet and lifestyle must change. While these changes may seem challenging and overwhelming at first, over time things will get easier.

This brochure highlights daily activities food allergy may impact. It will help you learn what to consider to avoid an allergic reaction.

Finally, keep in mind that you are not alone — an estimated 11 million Americans are living with food allergies. If you have any questions after you read this brochure, please call The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) office or send us an e-mail. We're here to help you.

There is no cure for food allergies. Just one little bite of allergy-causing food can cause a reaction. Strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food is the only way to prevent a reaction.

Living With Food Allergy

Planning in advance how to handle certain situations, reading labels vigilantly, and following avoidance strategies are key to maintaining control over a food allergy. The next two panels highlight some areas that you will need to think about, and plan for, to avoid a reaction.

Grocery shopping. Grocery shopping will take extra time because each food ingredient statement must be carefully read. Some manufacturers currently use scientific terms to indicate an allergy-causing ingredient. For instance, “albumin” and “lysozyme” are egg-containing ingredients; “casein” and “whey” indicate milk. Additionally, natural and artificial flavors and spices may contain common food allergens.

The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act requires manufacturers to use simple language (i.e., “egg” and “milk”) and to list allergens if they are present in colors, flavors, or spices in products manufactured on or after January 1, 2006. It will take more than one year for all products to have simple language on their labels. Until then, you must learn the scientific names for the food to which you are allergic and call manufacturers to ask about unfamiliar ingredients.

Read the labels on cosmetics and bath products (soaps, lotions, etc.), too, since these items may contain common allergens such as milk, egg, or wheat.

Cooking. Care must be taken in the kitchen to avoid contact with allergy-causing ingredients. This can occur in a number of ways, such as splatter from allergy-containing foods to allergy-free foods or “cross contact” (when one food comes in contact with another food, causing their proteins to mix; as a result, each food then contains small amounts of the other food).