

Nutrition facts

Cadence Health and Sneakys

No Eggs Please! Egg allergy facts

Food allergies such as egg can be tricky to deal with for those who have such an allergy or care for someone with egg allergy. Given the increasing numbers of centres and schools becoming egg-free zones it can also be a challenge for the general community. Huggies nutritionist, Leanne Cooper, takes a look at the facts around egg allergy and provides some useful tips to make life a little easier.

How common is egg allergy?

Egg allergy commonly raises its head between six and 15 months, when solids are being introduced. It is estimated that around 1-2 per cent of preschool-aged children are affected by egg allergy; but don't be fooled, it is one of the more common food allergies. Egg allergy in adulthood, however, is uncommon, and tends to exist in relation to other allergies and illnesses.

What is an allergic reaction?

Most commonly, food allergies occur as a consequence of a food protein, such as those found in milk, eggs, nuts and wheat. For reasons not yet well understood, the body in some cases treats these proteins as a foreign compound, resulting in an immune response.

What do you do if you suspect an egg allergy?

If you believe that egg is causing a problem you can contact a qualified nutritionist or dietitian who is versed in allergy testing. Using dietary methods to give a definitive diagnosis tends to be less stressful and offers a very clear picture of the culprit. However, if the issue is more severe or increasingly severe your GP would be the best place to start. You will require a referral to an allergy unit for an allergy skin prick test or a blood test (RAST test). It's good to keep in mind that even clinical testing can end in unclear results, for example you can have children who have positive tests but not show any reactions to the allergen at all.

Like any allergic reaction, the signs and symptoms can range from very mild to life-threatening as in the case of anaphylaxis, though this is less common in egg allergy than in those with peanut allergy. Some children experience skin issues where the egg has come in contact with the skin, for example around the mouth, while others have more diverse reactions including bloating, vomiting, respiratory problems and so on.

Is egg yolk ok?

While eggwhite is the most common part of egg to be an issue, for some the yolk may also cause problems. In most cases, particularly for children with diagnosed egg allergy it is easier for them to steer clear of whole egg, as contamination of eggwhite is very difficult to avoid.

Maneuvering around egg

Like most food allergies, the culprit food can turn up in unexpected foods and products. Reading food labels, in particular the ingredients panel, is a good start. However, egg can occur in unlabelled foods also, for example egg is used commonly to act as a binding agent in baking. The following is a brief list of foods that may contain egg as an ingredient:

- Battered foods

- Rissoles, patties and crumbed foods and meatloaf
- Biscuits and cakes, cake mixes
- Custards
- Egg noodles and some pastas
- Ice-cream and frozen deserts
- Malted chocolate drinks such as Ovaltine
- Mayonnaise
- Breads and pastries and glazed foods
- Vegetarian foods
- Muffins and mousse-type foods
- Some sausages
- Marshmallow and meringue and pavlova

'May contain traces of egg': just to be safe or a real concern?

In many manufacturing processes equipment is used to produce a number of different food products, which is why you find some products stating 'may contain traces of egg'. Potentially the product may have been in contact with equipment that was used in the manufacture of another product that contained egg. For those with severe reactions it is important to know this sort of information.

Other wording to look out for on food labels includes:

- Egg lecithin
- Albumin
- Ovalbumin
- Globulin

Helpful sites for handy recipes

Allergy recipe books

- RPA; Friendly Food Recipe and Food Intolerance Book from the Allergy Unit at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, Australia
www.cs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/allergy/resources/foodintol/friendlyfood.cfm

Anaphylaxis Australia

- Has produced a recipe book containing 80 recipes free of dairy, egg, wheat and sugar.
- www.allergyfacts.org.au/product.html

Substitutes for eggs in cooking: Check out this handy fact sheet

<http://www.sswahs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/allergy/resources/allergy/eggallergy.pdf>

Can you grow out of egg allergy?

Interestingly, some little ones can eat foods with a small amount of cooked egg without any problem. In any case, the good news is that some little ones will outgrow their egg allergy. Some 60 per cent of bubs and children will no longer react to egg by five to 10 years of age. This is most likely for those who have had milder reactions, for example skin irritations, than children with more severe reactions such as anaphylaxis. Allergy units and specialists are best at monitoring the situation.

Note: Vaccination scheduling should be discussed with your paediatrician if your child has an egg allergy.

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Can you reduce the chances of an egg allergy in children?

The jury is still out on this, and currently recommendations during pregnancy are not to restrict the diet unless the mother has a medical reason to do so. Restricting the maternal diet doesn't appear to reduce allergy in infants.

While it does appear that egg protein passes into breastmilk, breastfeeding itself seems to reduce allergies, potentially by the mother passing on some immune memory from her immune system as well as the active compounds in breastmilk being protective. Hence, again restricting the maternal diet isn't recommended without medical cause.

Starting solids prior to 16 weeks may also increase the risk of food allergy in infants, as their intestinal immunity is not yet sufficient to cope with the onslaught of solids.

Lastly, there is increasing evidence that suggests probiotics in the diet can reduce the incidence of food reactions and allergies and other reports suggest a diet rich in omega oils may reduce the incidence also.

Other sources of information and references

- Children's Hospital at Westmead
http://www.chw.edu.au/parents/factsheets/egg_allergy.htm
- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCIa)
http://www.allergy.org.au/component/option,com_frontpage/Itemid,1/
- RPA Allergy Unit
<http://www.cs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/allergy>
- Food shopping list
<http://www.cs.nsw.gov.au/rpa/allergy/resources/allergy/allergenfreeshoppinglist.pdf>
- Anaphylaxis Australia
<http://www.allergyfacts.org.au/index.html>

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