

# Patient Update

## Check Your List: Is your holiday menu naughty or nice?

Many people live for the holiday season, especially for the bountiful buffets and delectable desserts. However, the holidays can prove to be troublesome for people with food allergies.

The chance of accidental ingestion of the foods that can cause an allergic reaction may increase during the holiday season. It can take only a tiny amount of the offending food to trigger a potentially dangerous reaction.

The most common food allergies include milk, eggs, legumes (especially peanuts), soy, wheat, fish or shellfish, and tree nuts such as almonds, hazelnuts, pecans and walnuts. These allergens are often used as ingredients in the baked goods and appetizers that are so plentiful throughout the holidays.

### Preparing for a feast

Here are some tips to consider when planning holiday menus and when visiting households that are not allergy-aware:

- Homemade items do not have ingredient lists and can be contaminated with small amounts of allergenic foods through contact with storage containers, baking sheets and utensils.
- If you are highly sensitive to foods, be prepared with self-injectable epinephrine when attending a holiday party where unrecognized food allergens may be hiding.
- If you are a parent of a food-allergic child, remember to pack a snack for when school classes have holiday parties. This will

help ensure your child has something safe to eat.

- Avoid the following holiday party foods if you are allergic to their main ingredients, such as eggs, milk, wheat and nuts:

Baked goods/pastries (often contain nut products)

Eggnog

Fruitcake

Meatballs

Cheese

Glazed rolls/bread

Ice cream

Macaroni mixes

Quiches

Some salad dressings (could contain hidden sources of fish such as anchovies in Caesar salad)

Mixed nuts

Vegetable/chip dips

### Recognizing a food allergy reaction

Symptoms of an allergic food reaction can include a tingling sensation in the mouth, swelling of the tongue and the throat, difficulty breathing, hives, vomiting, abdominal cramps, diarrhea, drop in blood pressure, and loss of consciousness. Symptoms usually appear within minutes to two hours after the person has eaten the food. In severe cases, a life-threatening condition known as anaphylaxis may occur.

The best treatment for a food allergy is strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food. Reading ingredient labels for all foods is the key to maintaining control over the allergy. Make sure family and friends are aware of your conditions, and inform them of what to do in case of an emergency.



Fortunately, having a food allergy does not mean you have to go through a holiday without enjoying the holiday foods! You can substitute allergy-free ingredients in your favorite recipes. There are also many cookbooks on the market for people with food allergies. You can find some of them at [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org).

If you think you have a food allergy, consult with an allergist/immunologist. To find an allergist/immunologist in your area or to find additional information on food allergies, call the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology's (AAAAI) Physician Referral and Information Line at (800) 822-2762.

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