

Understanding [food allergies](#) and intolerances is key for successful business operations. People have allergies that can cause serious harm or even death if triggered, so it's vital to understand how allergies and intolerances work, and what your responsibilities are within the workplace.

## What is a Food Allergy?

It's important to acknowledge that there are two types of conditions to consider here. There is a food intolerance and a food allergy.

A [food intolerance](#) means that either the body cannot properly digest a particular food when it is consumed, or a particular food irritates the digestive system. The symptoms of food intolerance are fairly mild. They can be headaches, nausea, belly pain, diarrhoea, and cramps.

However, a [food allergy](#) is much more serious.

A food allergy occurs when somebody consumes a piece of food which the immune system considers to be an intruder. The immune system works 24/7 to keep the body safe. Diseases and harmful substances are considered to be threats to the body, so the immune system activates to protect you from serious harm.

So, when a foreign substance like food enters the body, and it is considered to be an intruder by your immune system, an allergic reaction takes place. This is a process we will go into more detail about later.

### [How Do Food Allergies Work?](#)

So, let's talk about what happens when you have a food allergy.

As we previously mentioned, your immune system works 24/7 to protect you from harmful diseases and substances. If a disease or substance enters the body which the immune system considers to be harmful, the appropriate steps are taken to protect you.

In this case, your immune system triggers an allergic reaction in the body, and releases a chemical known as histamine. This is typically the reaction that is produced. Histamine has a wide range of uses, specifically it tends to restrict the airways as a precautionary measure and also creates hives, which are the body's way of dealing with the harmful substance. Naturally,

having your airway restricted can be dangerous, so it's important to try and seek medical attention as soon as an allergic reaction starts.

## Types of Food Allergies

The big problem that comes with a [food allergy](#) is that there can be pretty much countless types of different allergies. People can be allergic to literally everything. Some people are allergic to ordinary food like breakfast cereal, or chocolate, and others are allergic to more exotic things like different types of seafood or particular spices. However, there are certain types of foods which are considered to be more problematic than others and are frequent allergy causing foods.

Common examples of foods that cause allergies are fish, milk, eggs, peanuts, soy, wheat, shellfish, and tree nuts.

## What Causes Food Allergies?

So, what is it that actually causes the [food allergy](#)? When we look at food allergies, and we explore them in detail, what is it about certain types of food that causes the allergic reaction in the body?

Allergic reactions are down to the proteins in food. No, we're not talking about the protein you get from meat. Every food has proteins in it, because proteins are long strings of molecules. They are the fundamental components of your food, and it is these proteins that the immune system mistakenly treats as a threat when an allergic reaction starts.

## Food Allergy Symptoms

When a food allergy starts, the body releases a series of chemicals into your bloodstream. These chemicals do certain things that create symptoms we equate with a food allergy. Let's take a look at some of the common food allergy symptoms.

Lots of people experience tingling or itching in the mouth, as well as swelling of the tongue and the general face area. It's also very common to get an itchy red rash called a hive.

In some cases, people can develop red and itchy skin without hives, but that is still an allergic reaction. Lots of people experience dizziness and feel lightheaded when a reaction starts, and many report wheezing, a shortness of breath, and difficulty swallowing.

The swelling of the body is often what results in the difficulty breathing, because your airway becomes obstructed by the inflammation of the cells. This is by far the most troubling symptom of food allergies, second only to anaphylactic shock, which we will talk about later.

## Getting Tested for Food Allergies

There are quite a few ways to get tested for a [food allergy](#). The most common is a skin prick test. During the skin prick test, drops of extracts found in common foods are placed onto your arm, and then your arm is pierced with a small lancet, which allows the food to come into contact with your immune system, and this will generate an allergic response if you have an allergy. Don't worry, this is done in controlled conditions.

In some cases, your doctor will perform the test using the food you brought with you all the food that you think has caused the reaction. If there is a positive reaction, you may experience itching, swelling or redness.

An alternative to the skin prick test is what we know as a blood test, which basically takes a sample of blood and then measures the number of allergic antibodies in your blood. The more antibodies that exist, the more likely you are to have an allergic reaction.

There is also the food elimination diet. If there is food that you think causes an allergic reaction, you take it out of your diet for anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks. After that, you re-introduce the food back into your diet. If the symptoms go away wow you are not eating the food, but return once that food comes back into your diet, then this is strong evidence for a food intolerance or allergy.

Do not try a food elimination diet by yourself, always consult a professional first.

It's probably worth noting that there are a handful of other tests, these are commercially available, which means you can purchase them, but generally speaking, they are not backed up by official studies or science, and are usually best avoided.

## Food Allergies in Children

Children are just as likely to develop food allergies throughout their lives, and this can be a serious problem. However, it is worth noting that some allergies are only temporary. There are many different allergies that

children develop that are simply part of growing up, and once they have matured into adults, the allergy seems to just fade away.

## Management and Treatment

When it comes to the management and treatment of a food allergy or intolerance, it is a joint effort between the consumer and business. As a business, you have a responsibility to print common allergens in bold and list them as part of your packaging or labelling.

Consumers will often try to avoid foods which they have an allergy towards, and if an allergic reaction does occur, symptoms can be lessened with the help of an antihistamine. A common remedy is hayfever tablets, as these are antihistamines, and can be used as a quick way to alleviate symptoms. However, in some cases, medical intervention is recommended.

## Anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis is the most serious condition that can come from an allergic reaction.

This is the most dangerous allergic reaction possible, and is fatal if not treated. It is a medical emergency that develops quickly and requires immediate medical attention, regardless of what emergency medication you use.

Anaphylactic shock can result in a rash, your throat closing up due to swelling, vomiting, shortness of breath, low blood pressure, loss of consciousness, or even medical shock. These symptoms can start very suddenly and get progressively worse in a very quick time.

Even if somebody has used an EpiPen, or has taken other medications and the condition seems to be improving, it is important to seek urgent medical treatment immediately to prevent long-term harm or death.

## Eating and Dining Out

Despite the fact that food allergies are quite common, people continue to dine and eat out on a regular basis. This is because restaurants and cafés are required by law to print the ingredients on their menus, and to highlight any allergens on the menu.

If a customer has any queries about specific ingredients, then you have to answer them as best you can, or if they request a certain dish that is free of

an allergy-inducing ingredient, it must be prepared in a clean and hygienic fashion away from other foods.

### Who is Affected?

The concerning thing about food allergies is that they can happen anywhere, at any time, to any person. People can develop allergies to foods they have been eating for years, and food allergies are purely random and not down to any external influences. That is why businesses need to be compliant with health and safety regulations, and vigilant if somebody in the premises begins experiencing an allergic reaction.