

Health Awareness

Food Allergies: What You Need To Know

(NAPSA)—Each year, millions of Americans have allergic reactions to food. Although most food allergies cause relatively mild and minor symptoms, some can cause severe reactions and may even be life threatening.

There is no cure for food allergies. Strict avoidance of known allergens, and early recognition and management of allergic reactions to food, are important measures to prevent serious health consequences. While more than 160 foods can cause allergic reactions in people with food allergies, the eight most common allergenic foods account for 90 percent of reactions, and are the food sources from which many other ingredients are derived.

These common allergens are milk, eggs, fish (e.g., bass, flounder, cod), crustacean shellfish (e.g., crab, lobster, shrimp), tree nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts, pecans), peanuts, wheat and soybeans.

To help Americans avoid the health risks posed by food allergens, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration now requires that the labels of all foods regulated by the FDA must clearly identify the source of all ingredients that are—or are derived from—the eight most common food allergens. (The FDA regulates all foods, domestic or imported, except meat, poultry, and certain egg products.)

These food labels help allergic consumers identify offending foods or ingredients so they can more easily avoid them.



Food labels must now identify any major food allergens they contain, either as an ingredient or a derivative.

The new law requires that food labels identify the food source of all major food allergens. Unless the food source of a major food allergen is part of the ingredient's common or usual name (or is already identified in the ingredient list), it must be included in one of two ways. The name of the food source of a major food allergen must appear:

1. In parentheses following the name of the ingredient. Examples: "lecithin (soy)," "flour (wheat)" and "whey (milk)"; or
2. Immediately after or next to the list of ingredients in a "contains" statement. Example: "Contains wheat, milk and soy."

Food products labeled before January 1, 2006, were not required to be relabeled under the new law. However, these foods may still be on store shelves—so be sure to take that into consideration while shopping and always use special care when reading labels.

For more information about food labels and food allergies, visit www.fda.gov.