

# ALLERGENS

People can eat most food safely. But, imagine what it would be like if eating a peanut butter sandwich or drinking a glass of milk left you vomiting, gasping for breath, and furiously scratching a fresh crop of hives. For people with food allergies, that's reality.

## Deadly consequences

A food allergic reaction is caused when the body's immune system responds to a foreign protein found in the offending food. Typically, the allergic reaction has a very rapid onset. Food allergy sufferers commonly experience:

- Vomiting,
- Diarrhea,
- Hives or rashes,
- Stomach cramps,
- Difficulty breathing,
- Tingling sensation in the mouth,
- Swelling of the tongue and throat, and
- Loss of consciousness.

The most severe reactions may even result in death.



## Common allergens

Many different foods can cause an allergic reaction, however; the majority of food allergies are caused by:

- Peanuts,
- Soybeans,
- Milk,
- Eggs,

- Fish,
- Wheat,
- Shellfish (e.g., shrimp, crab, lobster), and
- Tree nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts, pecans, cashews).

For sensitive individuals, the presence of allergens in food is potentially life-threatening. Currently, there is no cure for food allergies. The only way to treat food allergies is to avoid foods that trigger reactions.

### **Prevention is the key**

Most food companies are aware of how serious food allergies can be, and as a result, have made changes in their manufacturing and labeling practices.

Unfortunately, food allergens can still contaminate products by improper:

- Use of ingredients,
- Scheduling of product runs,
- Use of rework, or
- Clean-up or sanitation of equipment.

### **Ingredients**

To avoid accidental contamination, check shipments at receiving to determine that the correct ingredients and raw materials have been delivered as indicated on the order form or bill of lading.

Storing allergenic ingredients separately from other ingredients is also a way to prevent contamination of other products.

Also, always check the ingredients before they're added to a batch of product. Each ingredient should be checked against the formula or recipe sheet and marked off as they are added to the mix. Labels on ingredient bags and containers must be carefully read.

## Processing

Follow all company food safety procedures when making products to avoid allergen contamination, which may include:

- Using separate or color-coded equipment (e.g., scoops, pails, totes, bins, hoppers, conveyors) only for products that contain a known allergen. This prevents residue that may be left on equipment from contaminating other products.
- Visually inspecting equipment for allergen residue or build-up from previous production runs before processing begins of another product.
- Processing allergen-containing products at the end of the day or week so that there is time to clean the equipment before the next production run.
- Manufacturing products that don't contain an allergen before products that do.
- Adding the allergen ingredient near the end of processing.

## Labeling

People with food allergies must always read the label of all foods, every time they shop, therefore; it's very important to verify that the correct labels are used on products when they're packaged.



## Rework

All rework must be clearly labeled. It can only be used in a product that is compatible with the product being made at the time. For example, rework that has egg in it, can only be used in a product that also contains egg and is declared on the label as such.

Also, waste product that may contain allergens must be disposed of properly.

### **Sanitation**

Proper cleanup following the processing of products that contain allergens is essential. Equipment may need to be disassembled and cleaned by hand to make sure hard to reach areas are free of allergen residue, and visually inspected after cleaning. All of these steps should be properly documented.

Also, ingredient bins or containers should be cleaned between uses in storage or pre-weight areas to prevent mixing and cross contamination.

Finally, if you work with any type of allergenic food, you must follow good personal hygiene practices. Even minute traces of allergenic foods can be transferred from your clothes or hands to another product. Be sure to change your gloves, apron, smock, or other garments before beginning work on a product that does not contain an allergen.

### **In conclusion**

It takes the awareness and contribution of every employee to avoid this type of serious contamination. It's very important that you follow all company food safety rules and procedures concerning allergens. Allergen control is a necessary part of manufacturing a safe product for consumers.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### ALLERGENS REVIEW

1. A food allergic reaction is caused by:
  - a. Eating too much food
  - b. The body's response to a foreign protein
  - c. A reaction to harmful bacteria in the food
  - d. All of the above
2. Sufferers of food allergies commonly experience:
  - a. Vomiting
  - b. Hives
  - c. Difficulty breathing
  - d. All of the above
3. Common food allergens include:
  - a. Peanuts
  - b. Milk
  - c. Fish
  - d. All of the above
4. The only way to treat food allergies is to:
  - a. Get a shot
  - b. Lay down and rest
  - c. Avoid foods that trigger reactions
  - d. None of the above
5. Food allergens can contaminate products by improper:
  - a. Use of ingredients
  - b. Use of rework
  - c. Clean-up or sanitation of equipment
  - d. All of the above
6. To avoid accidental contamination of ingredients with allergens:
  - a. Check shipments of ingredients and raw materials at receiving
  - b. Store allergenic ingredients separately from other ingredients
  - c. Always check the ingredients before they're added to a batch of food
  - d. All of the above

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7. To avoid allergen contamination when processing products, you should:
  - a. Visually inspect equipment for allergen residue or buildup from previous production runs before processing begins on another product
  - b. Use separate or color-coded equipment for products that contain a known allergen
  - c. Add the allergen ingredient near the end of processing
  - d. All of the above
8. Rework that contains an allergen must be:
  - a. Clearly labeled
  - b. Only used in a compatible product
  - c. Both (a) and (b)
  - d. Neither (a) nor (b)
9. Proper cleanup following the processing of products that contain allergens may include:
  - a. Disassembling equipment
  - b. Cleaning areas of equipment by hand
  - c. Visually inspecting equipment after cleaning
  - d. All of the above
10. When working with foods that contain allergens, you should always:
  - a. Follow all company food safety rules
  - b. Work as quickly as possible
  - c. Avoid your co-workers
  - d. All of the above