



Fact Sheet

LABELLING OF FOODS CAUSING ALLERGIES AND SENSITIVITIES

What foods are most commonly associated with allergies?

A variety of foods contain ingredients that can cause adverse reactions in hypersensitive individuals. Most adverse food reactions are caused by the following foods and products made from them:

- peanuts
- tree nuts (almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts (filberts), macadamia nuts, pecans, pinenuts,
- pistachios, walnuts)
- sesame seeds
- milk
- eggs
- fish, crustaceans (e.g. crab, crayfish, lobster, shrimp) and shellfish (e.g. clams, mussels, oysters, scallops)
- soy
- wheat
- sulphites

Why are potential allergens in foods sometimes not declared on the label?

Undeclared ingredients on food labels may occur because of such things as carry-over of product through incomplete cleaning of surfaces and utensils, incorrect or incomplete list of ingredients, or unknown ingredients in raw materials.

What is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) doing?

The CFIA is working with the food industry to ensure that the foods listed above are always declared in the list of ingredients on the food label, and that they develop allergen prevention strategies to manage the allergy risk. This initiative is in line with the Agency's role to enforce Canada's ingredient labelling requirements under the Food and Drugs Regulations, and our commitment to helping consumers make safe food choices.

In consultation with the food industry and allergy groups, the federal government has also developed a precautionary labelling policy, e.g. "may contain peanuts". This policy allows the food industry to voluntarily label products that may inadvertently contain substances capable of causing severe adverse reactions. Precautionary labelling must be truthful and must not take the place of good manufacturing practices.

What should I do if I am unsure about the ingredients in a particular product?

Consumers with food allergies are advised to contact the manufacturer of a particular product, and in the case of restaurant meals, to enquire about the ingredients used. However, if in doubt about a food, it is best to avoid it.

Common allergens may be listed in the ingredient list on the label under alternate names, making it difficult for the consumer to identify which substance to avoid. Please see the table below for common alternative names for allergens and possible hidden sources.

Hidden sources and alternative names of foods causing adverse reactions reported in the scientific literature and by Canadian government inspection agencies

FOOD	ALTERNATIVE NAMES OR COMPONENTS	HIDDEN SOURCES
PEANUTS	goober nuts* goober peas* ground nuts* mandelonas* arachis oil (*These names are not allowed on food labels in Canada)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • almond icing (Evans et al., 1988) • de flavoured, re flavoured sold as walnuts, almonds, etc. (Keating et al., 1990) • chili (Yunginger, et al., 1989) • peanut oil (Hoffman and Collins-Williams, 1994) • baby formula (Moneret-Vautrin et al., 1991) • vegetable burger (Donovan and Peters, 1990) • flavouring in dry soup mix (McKenna and Klotz, 1997) • chocolate from Europe • peanut oil in enrichment vitamins added to milk • gravy • egg rolls • hazelnut paste
ALMOND TREE NUTS CASHEW	marzipan nuts anacardium nuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • marzipan cake • pesto sauce • coffee grinders used to grind nut-flavoured coffees
MILK	casein sodium caseinate lactalbumin lactoglobulin whey curds lactose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chocolate • casein in wax (fresh fruits and vegetables) • ice cream in sorbet (Bristol, 1992) • lactose in seasoning and lactalbumin as natural flavour (Schwartz, 1992) • casein and whey protein in lactose (Watson et al., 1995) • at substitute from milk (Sampson and Cooke, 1990) • seasoned potato chips (Watson et al., 1995) • milk in “non-dairy” hot dog and bologna (Gern et al., 1991) • milk glaze on bakery products
EGGS	albumin ovalbumin ovomucoid lysozyme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fat substitute from egg (Sampson and Cooke, 1990) • glazes on baked goods • lysozyme in cheese
SOY	lecithin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • soy in bread • meat based pizza topping • similibacon • soy protein in soy lecithin and margarine (Porras et al., 1985) • milled corn (Taylor, 1995) • soup stock cubes and Spanish sausage (Vidal et al., 1997) • in bread crumbs • canned tuna (in broth)
FISH	surimi kamaboko	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surimi in pizza (O'Neil et al., 1993) • anchovies in Worcestershire sauce

FOOD	ALTERNATIVE NAMES OR COMPONENTS	HIDDEN SOURCES
WHEAT	spelt kamut triticale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • falafel • binders and fillers in meat, poultry and fish products • icing sugar • baking powder • paprika • seasonings • wheat germ in black pepper
SULPHITES	sulphurous acid E 223 and E 224 (european appellation) potassium bisulphite potassium metabisulphite sodium bisulphite sodium mtabisulphite sodium sulphite sodium dithionite sulphurous acid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coconut juice • vinegar • grape juice • wine • glucose • molasses • dried fruits (raisins, papaya, pineapple, etc.)

Table taken in part from: Marion Zarkadas, M.Sc., Fraser W. Scott, Ph.D., John Salminen, B.A.Sc., Antony Ham Pong, MBBS, FRCPC, 1999

Information Letter: To All Interested Parties

Information Letter: To Food Manufacturers, Importers, Distributors and their Associations

Food and Drug Regulations Review, Project 19 Consultation

For more information on foodborne illness and safe food handling practices, visit the Canadian Food Inspection Agency website at www.inspection.gc.ca

P0267E-02

July 2002