



Wheat

One of the nine most
common food allergens



Allergic reactions

Severe allergic reactions (e.g. anaphylactic reaction) occur when the body's immune system strongly reacts to a particular allergen protein or irritant. These reactions may be caused by food, insect stings and medications. In Canada, the nine priority food allergens are peanuts, tree nuts, sesame seeds, milk, eggs, fish (including crustaceans and shellfish), soy, wheat and sulphites.

What are the symptoms of an allergic reaction?

When someone comes in contact with an allergen, the symptoms of a reaction may develop quickly and rapidly progress from mild to severe. The most dangerous symptoms include breathing difficulties, a drop in blood pressure or shock, which may result in loss of consciousness and even death. Severe allergic reactions can occur quickly and without warning. A person experiencing an allergic reaction may have **any** of the following symptoms:

- Flushed face, hives or a rash, red and itchy skin
- Swelling of the eyes, face, lips, throat and tongue
- Trouble breathing, speaking or swallowing
- Anxiousness, distress, faintness, paleness, sense of doom, weakness
- Cramps, diarrhea, vomiting
- A drop in blood pressure, rapid heart beat, loss of consciousness

How are food allergies and severe food allergy reactions treated?

Currently there is no cure for food allergies. The only option is complete avoidance of the specific allergen. Appropriate emergency treatment for a severe food allergy reaction includes an injection of epinephrine (adrenalin), which is available in an auto-injector, such as an EpiPen[®]. Adrenalin must be administered as soon as symptoms of a severe allergic reaction appear. The injection is followed by further treatment and observation in a hospital emergency room. If your allergist has diagnosed you with a food allergy and prescribed epinephrine, carry it with you all the time and know how to use it. Follow your allergist's advice on how to use an EpiPen[®].

Frequently asked questions about wheat allergies

I have a wheat allergy. How can I avoid a wheat-related reaction?

Avoid all food and products that contain wheat and wheat derivatives, including any product whose ingredient list warns it “may contain” wheat.

What is the difference between a wheat allergy and celiac disease?

Wheat allergy and celiac disease are two different conditions. When someone has a wheat allergy his/her immune system has an abnormal reaction to proteins from wheat, with symptoms similar to that of other allergic food reactions. When a person suffering from celiac disease eats food containing the protein gluten, which is found in wheat and some other grains, it damages the lining of the small intestine, which stops the body from absorbing nutrients. This can lead to diarrhoea, weight loss and eventually malnutrition. If you are unsure whether you have a wheat allergy or celiac disease, consult an allergist.

How can I determine if a product contains wheat or wheat derivatives?

Always read the ingredient list carefully. Wheat and wheat derivatives can often be present under different names, e.g., semolina. Do not forget that cross-contamination, e.g., using the same plate that was just used to serve sliced bread, can also be a potential source of the allergen.

What do I do if I am not sure whether a product contains wheat or wheat derivatives?

If you have a wheat allergy, do not eat or use the product. Get ingredient information from the manufacturer.

Always read the ingredient list carefully. Wheat and wheat derivatives can often be present under different names, e.g., semolina.

Avoiding wheat and wheat derivatives

Make sure you read product labels carefully to avoid products that contain wheat and wheat derivatives. Always ask questions about food preparation, ingredients and the possibility of cross-contamination when eating out and buying food from retail food outlets, e.g., in-store bakeries, shopping centre food outlets. Avoid food and products that do not have an ingredient list and read labels **every time** you shop. Manufacturers may occasionally change their recipes or use different ingredients for varieties of the same brand. Refer to the following list before shopping:

Other names for wheat

Bulgur
Couscous
Durum, ein korn, emmer, farrow
Enriched/white/whole wheat flour
Farina
Gluten
Graham flour, high gluten/protein flour
Kamut
Seitan
Semolina
Spelt
Triticale, e.g., a cross between wheat and rye
Triticum aestivum
Wheat bran/germ

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Possible sources of wheat

Note: Avoid all food and products that contain wheat in the ingredient list, e.g., wheat germ.

Baked goods and baking mixes, e.g., breads, cakes, cookies, doughnuts, muffins
Baking powder, flour, icing sugar
Battered/fried foods
Bread crumbs, cereals, crackers
Canned soups, e.g., “thickened” soups, gravy mixes
Coffee substitutes made from cereal
Cross-contamination, e.g., containers, food in deep fryers, utensils
Ethnic foods
Falafel
Gelatinized starch, modified starch, modified food starch
Hydrolyzed wheat protein
Ice cream
Meat, fish and poultry binders and fillers, e.g., deli meats, hot dogs, surimi (used to make imitation crab/lobster meat)
Natural flavouring (from malt, wheat)
Pasta
Pie fillings
Prepared ketchup, mustard
Salad dressings
Sauces, e.g., chutney, soy sauce
Seasonings, spices, e.g., paprika, black pepper
Snack foods, e.g., candy, chocolate bars

Non-food sources of wheat

Cosmetics, hair care products
Medications, vitamins
Pet food
Wreath decorations

Note: These lists are not complete and may change. Food and food products purchased from other countries, through mail-order or the Internet, are not always produced using the same manufacturing and labelling standards as in Canada.

What can I do?

Be informed

See an allergist and educate yourself about food allergies. Contact your local allergy association for further information.

If you or anyone you know has food allergies or would like to receive information about food being recalled, sign up for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency’s (CFIA) free e-mail “Allergy Alerts and Food Recalls” subscription service available at www.inspection.gc.ca. When you sign up you will automatically receive food recall public warnings.

Before eating

Allergists recommend that if you do not have your EpiPen[®] with you, that you not eat. If an ingredient list says a product “may contain” or “does contain” wheat or wheat derivatives, do not eat. If you do not recognize an ingredient or there is no ingredient list available, avoid the product.

Allergists recommend that if you do not have your EpiPen[®] with you, that you not eat.



What is the Government of Canada doing about food allergens?

The Government of Canada is committed to providing safe food to all Canadians. The CFIA and Health Canada work closely with municipal, provincial and territorial partners and industry to meet this goal.

The CFIA enforces Canada's labelling laws and works with associations, distributors, food manufacturers and importers to ensure complete and appropriate labelling of all foods. The CFIA recommends that food companies establish effective allergen controls to minimize the potential for allergic reactions. When the CFIA becomes aware of a potential serious hazard associated with a food, such as undeclared allergens, the food product is recalled from the marketplace and a public warning is issued.

The *Food and Drug Regulations* require that most pre-packaged foods carry a label and that their ingredients appear in a list in decreasing order of proportion. However, they do not currently require components (e.g. ingredients of ingredients) of certain foods and products, such as flavouring, seasoning, spices and vinegar, to be listed on food labels.

Health Canada has worked with the medical community, consumer associations, and the food industry to enhance labelling requirements for priority allergens, gluten sources and sulphite in pre-packaged foods sold in Canada. These regulations would require that the most common food and food ingredients that cause life-threatening or severe allergic reactions are always identified by their common names that consumers can easily recognize on food labels.

The CFIA enforces Canada's labelling laws and works with associations, distributors, food manufacturers and importers to ensure complete and appropriate labelling of all foods.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on food allergies and to subscribe to the free "Allergy Alerts and Food Recalls" e-mail subscription service, contact the CFIA at **www.inspection.gc.ca** or **1 800 442-2342** (8:00 am to 4:00 pm local time – Monday to Friday).

For information on this and other Government of Canada programs and services call **1 800 O-Canada** (**1 800 622-6232**) **TTY 1 800 465-7735**

Below are some of the organizations that can provide additional allergy information:

Allergy/Asthma Information Association **www.aaia.ca**
(English only)
Anaphylaxis Canada **www.anaphylaxis.ca** (English only)
Association Québécoise Des Allergies Alimentaires
www.aqaa.qc.ca (French only)
Canadian Celiac Association **www.celiac.ca**
Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology
www.csaci.medical.org (English only)
Health Canada **www.hc-sc.gc.ca**

Developed in consultation with the Allergy/Asthma Information Association, Anaphylaxis Canada, Association Québécoise Des Allergies Alimentaires, the Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, the Canadian Celiac Association and Health Canada.