



# NUTRIGRAM

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## Why can't you eat that?

You might notice that there are some foods that you can't eat that your friends can and some foods that you can eat and they can't. One reason for this might be food allergies. More than 11 million people in the U.S. have food allergies. Almost anyone can have food allergies, but they are more common in children than adults. May is Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month and the week of May 14th is Food Allergy Awareness Week. If you don't have food allergies, now is a good time to learn about them and if you do have allergies, now is a good time to help your friends understand what having a food allergy is like.

### **What are food allergies?**

A food allergy happens when someone's body thinks that part of a food is dangerous and attacks it. The attack (called an immune response) can be big or small depending on the person and the food. Some people will feel a tingling in their lips or an itch in their throats. In serious cases, the attack can make the person's throat swell up and make it hard to breathe. This type of reaction is called anaphylaxis and can be life threatening.

### **What foods can cause allergies?**

It is possible to be allergic to almost any food, but 90% of all allergies are caused by peanuts, eggs, milk, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy and wheat. It can take a very small amount of these foods to cause a response in someone who is allergic. In very severe cases, just smelling or touching a food can cause a response.

### **How are food allergies treated?**

The only way to prevent an allergic response is to completely avoid the food that causes the allergy. This means that if you are allergic to peanuts, you should never eat peanuts or foods made with peanuts. If someone accidentally eats a food they are allergic to, they will need medical treatment right away. Some people will be treated with an allergy medicine in a pill while others will need an injection.

### **Here are some tips to stay safe with food allergies:**

#### *If you have food allergies:*

- ▶ Read labels and ask about ingredients in food.
- ▶ Don't eat something if you aren't sure if it is safe.
- ▶ Call ahead when visiting a friend to let them know about your food allergies.
- ▶ Talk to the chef at your school about which foods are safe for you.
- ▶ Get medical treatment right away if you accidentally eat the food you are allergic to or if you feel a reaction coming on.
- ▶ Wash your hands before and after eating.

#### *If you have a friend with food allergies:*

- ▶ Don't share your food with your friend if you aren't sure it is safe.
- ▶ Don't serve foods that your friend is allergic to when they come to visit.
- ▶ Help your friend get medical treatment if they eat the food they are allergic to.
- ▶ Wash your hands before and after eating.
- ▶ Learn more about food allergies by asking your friend or going to [www.foodallergyinitiative.org](http://www.foodallergyinitiative.org).

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