

Anaphylaxis Canada

Living Confidently With Food Allergy

A guide for parents and families

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PLEASE READ THIS NOTE BEFORE READING THE HANDBOOK

The information in this handbook is general in nature and for information and educational purposes only. It is meant to help people learn how to manage a child's allergies. It is not meant to give specific medical advice, recommendations, diagnosis, or treatment.

Readers should not rely on any information contained in this handbook as a replacement or substitute for professional medical advice or diagnosis or treatment. Nor should they delay getting professional medical advice or treatment because of information contained in this handbook. Medical knowledge is constantly developing.

Please speak with your child's doctor or other healthcare professional before making any medical decision that affects your child or if you have any questions or concerns about their food allergies.

The authors of this handbook – Michael Pistiner, Jennifer LeBovidge and Anaphylaxis Canada – as well as individual contributors and reviewers will not be held responsible for any action taken or not taken based on, or as a result of, the reader's interpretation or understanding of the information contained or referred to herein.



Daily Life - Putting it all Together

Managing Food Allergy at Home

Home is the perfect place for you and your family to learn how to manage food allergy, because so much more is under your control. You decide which foods enter your home, and you can set up household rules to prevent cross-contamination when storing, preparing and serving food. You also have more time to read food labels and teach your child this skill in a relaxed setting. Your child can also be involved in meal planning at home. They will gradually learn safe practices, such as replacing ingredients in favourite recipes to make them safe to eat.

Create a plan that works for your family. Decide whether or not your child's allergens will be allowed into your home. You might consider the age of the child with allergies and their siblings. Young children are often messy eaters and put their hands in their mouths. It is also important to keep the dietary needs of other family members in mind when making these choices. In some cases it will not be practical to keep an allergen completely out of the home.²⁰

Take steps to avoid cross-contamination²⁰

- Be careful about sharing food, napkins, dishware, cups and utensils (forks, knives, spoons).
- Ask everyone to wash their hands before and after preparing food.
- Ask everyone to wash their hands before and after meals.
- Keep foods that do not contain your child's allergens away from those that do. For example, have a special shelf for your child's food in cupboards. Do not store their food on shelves below those where food with their allergens are kept in case of spillage.
- Remember to keep the ingredient labels if you separate large packages of food into smaller portions.
- Clean surfaces (e.g. kitchen counter, table top, microwave) and use clean pots, pans and utensils when preparing food.
- Prepare allergen-free food before food that contains your child's allergens. Set their dish aside and cover it in case other food splatters during cooking.
- Eat in certain areas of the home only (e.g. kitchen or dining table).
- Carefully label containers that contain your child's leftovers.
- Keep some ready-to-serve foods on hand that are safe for your child when you are too busy to cook.

Download the Weekly Meal Planner exercise from
www.anaphylaxis.ca or www.allergyhome.org



Be ready to treat an allergic reaction

- Keep your child's auto-injectors and any other medications recommended by your doctor handy. Make sure they are out of reach of young children and that family members know where they are kept.
- Post a copy of your child's emergency plan, including the phone number of your local emergency services.

Remember! The kitchen refrigerator is a great place to post a copy of your child's emergency plan.



Play Dates, Parties & Other Activities

Social activities are important for your child's happiness and self-esteem. Your child will be in the company of other kids and adults at play dates, birthday parties and other activities. Other families may not understand what practices to follow to keep your child safe or how serious an allergic reaction can be.

You can take steps to make sure your child is not left out because of their food allergies. The key is to plan ahead by informing your host and letting your child know what to expect. With your help, you will find that others are often willing to support your child.

Call the host several days before a play date

- Ask what food will be served and whether an adult will be supervising meal and snack time. Offer to send along a safe meal and treat for your child if needed. Freeze snacks, such as cookies, for parties. They are easy to defrost when you need them.
- If the host is responsible for preparing food for your child, ask them if they know how to ensure the food is free of your child's allergens. If they are unsure and willing to learn, take the time to teach them.
- If you are leaving your child in the care of others, give the host your child's auto-injector and emergency plan, and be sure that they know how to use them. Set up a time to teach them or another adult who will be present at the event how to recognize an allergic reaction, use your child's auto-injector, and contact emergency services. Find a time when you have the host's full attention (the day of a party will likely be too busy), and use an auto-injector training device to help them learn and build their comfort level.
- Provide your host with your contact information and ask them to contact you if they have questions or in case of an emergency.
- If you sense that the host is not comfortable being responsible for your child, offer to stay at the party with your child. Gradually, other parents will start to feel more confident about caring for your child.



Teaching Children

Include your child in preparations for social activities. This way, they will understand what rules they must follow and the reasons why. When kids are included in planning, they will feel more confident and be more likely to follow the rules.

Let your child make some decisions, which will help them feel more in control. For example, ask them if they prefer to take cookies or a cupcake to the party. Birthday cake has many common food allergens and is often unsafe for kids with food allergies. Remind your child to only eat foods that you have approved, whether it is food that you have bought or made or food prepared by the host.

Prepare your child so they understand that they may not be able to eat what other children are eating. Keep them focused on what they can do and can have. For example, they may not be able to eat all of the food being served at a party, or have treats from loot or goody bags, but they will have fun with their friends!

For activities where a large group is eating together, involve your child in thinking about which solution is the best one for them. For example, your child can eat before attending a team celebration, bring their own food or choose safe food items at the event with your help.



Relatives & Babysitters

With food allergies, your child has needs that require special attention. It can be stressful to leave your child with a babysitter, a relative or other caregiver, especially for the first time. Education, careful planning and good communication will help ease your worries as others learn how to care for them.

Let others know about your child's food allergies so that they can decide whether they feel up to taking care of them. For some, this responsibility may seem overwhelming and too much for them to handle. Others will be more comfortable. Your child should be in the care of those who are ready for the task.

Find a time to meet when the caregiver can provide their full attention. Do this before leaving your child in their care. If you give the person information in a hurry as you are leaving, you may forget to mention important details. Also, it is not a reasonable or fair way to teach others.

Talk to the caregiver about food that your child can eat. If the person does not feel comfortable preparing food for your child, offer to do this yourself. If they agree to prepare food, make sure they know how to ensure the food is free of your child's allergens. If they are unsure and willing to learn, take the time to teach them.

Make sure that caregivers know how to recognize an allergic reaction and how to use the auto-injector. Allow time for questions and practice using the auto-injector before you leave. Review your child's emergency plan.

Teaching Children

- Let your child participate when teaching caregivers. Even young children can tell others what they are allergic to and what rules they must follow. When involved, children learn how to explain their allergies to others in their own words and gain their support.
- Encourage your child to tell an adult right away if they think they have accidentally eaten something that they are allergic to, are having symptoms of a reaction or are worried about something.
- Remind children to say "no thank you" if they are offered food that may not be safe.
- In the case of older children, make sure they have a way to contact you if they have any concerns.



Childcare & School

During the day your child will be in contact with many staff members and other children. They may move around to different locations, both inside and outside the school or childcare centre. Since there can be risks in different settings - classroom, lunchroom, cafeteria, or the school yard - procedures should be in place to manage food allergens. This is also true for special activities, such as class trips, after-school programs and bus travel to and from home.^{21 22 23}

Find out if your child's school or childcare has a policy or guidelines for managing food allergies. Some may have this in place. Others may lack a clear policy if they have not had children with food allergies before, so you may even have an opportunity to get involved with the policy development. In any case, you should set up a meeting with the principal or childcare director to discuss your child's needs.

Give the school or childcare centre

- Your child's Anaphylaxis Emergency Plan. Complete this each year or whenever there are any changes such as the addition of new food allergies, the removal of allergies that are outgrown or changes to treatment instructions.
- Auto-injectors that are in date (i.e. not expired).
- Permission to treat your child according to their physician's instructions if they have an allergic reaction.
- Safe snacks for your child. Their teacher can keep these for times when a snack is not packed or your child cannot have a treat that is given to other kids. These should be foods that do not go bad (i.e. non-perishable).

The emergency plan should include information about your child such as their allergies, what to do in the event of a reaction and emergency contact information.

Communicate with the school and childcare community

- Find out who is responsible for the allergy policy. Ask to be contacted about upcoming events that involve food such as celebrations, trips and special activities. Offer to answer any questions they may have. Volunteer to help with activities if you have time.
- Ask that the school or childcare staff inform other parents about food allergies. Staff such as the principal, director, teacher or nurse can help with getting others to follow and understand allergy policies.
- Make an effort to develop a positive relationship with other parents. Try to educate with facts rather than emotion.

Teaching Children

Review the basic rules with your child. Remind them to:

- Wash their hands before and after eating.
- Only eat food that is approved by a trusted adult.
- Use dishware, utensils (spoons, forks, etc.), cups and bottles meant for them. They should not share with others.
- Tell an adult right away if they think they have accidentally eaten something they are allergic to, are having symptoms of a reaction or are worried about something.

Take your child to meet their teacher and see their classroom ahead of time. This will help your child become comfortable in these new settings. Consider asking if classmates and childcare friends can be taught about food allergies. This can be done by having a teacher or school nurse read a children's book about food allergies.

Some parents get involved in classroom activities. Ask your child if they want to be involved. Some will feel proud to teach their friends about their allergies. Others may not want to stand out and may prefer to watch.



Learn more about managing allergies at school by visiting
www.allergysafecommunities.ca or www.allergyhome.org



Dining Out at Restaurants

Eating outside the home can be a fun and enjoyable social activity for children. You can take steps to make sure that dining out is a safe experience for your child. Like many other activities, this depends on planning ahead, giving clear information about your child's food allergies, making careful choices about their meals and being prepared for food allergy emergencies.

Before dining out

- Visit the restaurant's website (if there is one) to see the menu and allergen policy. Check what types of food they serve. Some types of cooking (cuisine) may present a greater risk because of ingredients that are commonly used.²⁴
- You can also call ahead to speak with the manager or chef about safe meal choices for your child. Try to phone at a quiet time for the restaurant so that staff can talk to you without distractions.
- Some restaurants will be willing to prepare something simple for your child even if it is not on the menu.
- Choose restaurants where staff members understand the language you speak.
- Consider preparing a card that lists your child's specific allergies. This can be given to the chef **after talking to restaurant staff about your child's allergy.**

At the restaurant

- Make sure that you have your child's auto-injector. Make it a rule that they don't eat without it.
- Go early, before the restaurant gets busy. Staff will have more time to answer your questions and help choose your child's meal.
- Speak with someone in charge, such as a manager or chef, as well as your server. State what foods your child is allergic to, and make it clear that this is not a preference or your child being fussy.
- Choose menu items that are simple (e.g. grilled steak with baked potato and steamed vegetable). Dishes with a lot of ingredients or those made in advance (e.g. stews and sauces) may have hidden allergens. Also, staff may forget about something in a dish if there are many ingredients.
- Ask how food is prepared. Cross-contamination can happen when the same equipment or utensils (e.g. spoons, knives,) are used. Some examples: French fries may be made in the same fryer used to deep-fry battered shrimp and fish; a knife that has been used to slice pizza with anchovies (fish) may also be used to cut a cheese pizza.

- Avoid salad bars and buffets. There is a high risk of cross-contamination. Spoons could be used for more than one dish, and food from one dish could be dropped into another.
- Be cautious of desserts, because they often contain many common allergens and have a high risk of cross-contamination (e.g. peanut, nuts, milk, egg, soy and wheat).
- If there is any doubt that a safe meal can be made for your child, find a different restaurant.
- Let the restaurant know when they do a good job of providing an allergy-safe meal.^{16 20 24}

Teaching Children

- Practice ordering food using role-play. You can be the server or chef, and your child can tell you about their food allergies and ask questions. This way, they get to practice at home before they are old enough to order on their own.
- With older children, use take-out menus or go on-line to check out menus. Ask your child what meals they would like to order and help them think about questions to ask at the restaurant.
- At the restaurant, let children speak for themselves and ask questions if they are ready for this. This experience will increase their skills and comfort while you are there to provide support. Your child will eat out with friends when they are older. Prepare them now with strong skills and confidence for the future.
- Remind them to thank restaurant staff when they are helpful.
- Teach your child that no epinephrine = no food.



Always have your child's auto-injector with you. **No epinephrine = no food.**

Travel

Taking a trip to another area in your country or elsewhere gives children the chance to learn about their world. Start your planning as far in advance as possible. You should choose somewhere to stay that best suits your family's needs. For example, having a kitchenette will be useful for preparing some of your meals and keeping fresh food on hand. Keep in mind that laws and policies are different in different countries, including laws and policies for airlines, restaurants and food labelling.

Restaurants and travel

- Call ahead to ask about food allergy policies and if there are safe options that can be prepared for your child. Consider visiting chain restaurants that have food allergy policies.

Car travel

- If you plan to rent a car, make sure that it has been cleaned, including any car seats.
- Pack safe snacks and meals for your child in case there are no safe restaurants, rest stops or grocery stores on your route. Take a cooler and ice packs for long journeys.

Air travel

- Always carry your child's epinephrine auto-injector with you in your carry-on bag.
- Call the airline before booking your flight to ask about their allergy policy.
- When booking your flight, tell the airline about your child's food allergy.
- Contact your doctor ahead of time to get any paper work that the airline needs (e.g. a doctor's letter confirming your child's allergy and what medication is needed).
- Bring food and snacks for your child to eat during the flight. Make sure to bring enough food in case of delays and layovers.
- Consider asking to board the plane early so that you can clean the seat and anything in the area that your child is likely to touch. Don't forget to bring your own cleaning wipes.
- Let the flight attendant know about your child's food allergy as soon as you can.

Hotels

- When booking, ask to speak to the manager of the hotel restaurant about their allergy policies and if they are able to provide safe meals for your child.
- Some hotels offer kitchen units or rent small refrigerators. If you plan on preparing your child's meals, find out where the nearest grocery store is located.
- Be aware of in-room snack bars and make sure that your child does not have access to any unsafe items.

Foreign countries

- Find out if your health insurance policy covers services in other countries. You may need to purchase out-of-country insurance.
- Have extra auto-injectors and other medication prescribed by your doctor, as well as extra copies of emergency plans.
- Contact the national food allergy organization to find local information.
- Find information on local labelling laws and read labels carefully.
- Get information about your child's allergy translated. You can give this written information to those who prepare food for your child to help them understand your child's needs.
- Make sure that you know how to contact emergency services and explain that your child is having an allergic reaction.
- Know where the nearest hospital is located.

Teaching Children

- Talk to your child about steps you will take to make sure that they have safe food to eat.
- Whenever possible, involve your child in selecting and preparing snacks.

make A Travel checklist:

- in-date auto-injectors (including extra auto-injectors)
- carrying case for auto-injector
- Asthma inhalers
- other medication
- copies of emergency plan
- safe snacks
- medical identification jewelry
- Doctor's note
- cleaning wipes
- Cell phone



Getting ready for a trip?

Visit www.anaphylaxis.ca or
www.allergyhome.org for suggested
websites and resources.



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