



# UNDERSTANDING FOOD ALLERGY



Allergic disease is the most common chronic medical condition in childhood. Food allergy will affect on average 1 or 2 pupils in every class.

## WHAT IS A FOOD ALLERGY?



Food allergy is an overactivity of our immune system. Instead of ignoring a food, the immune system mistakenly sees it as harmful and reacts to it. A food allergy is very different to a food intolerance or a diet choice. An intolerance does not involve the immune system and is less serious.



Allergic reactions can vary in severity from mild and moderate, to severe and even life-threatening. Severe allergic reactions are called anaphylaxis and need to be treated as a medical emergency. To treat anaphylaxis, you need to give adrenaline immediately using an adrenaline auto-injector, e.g. an EpiPen.



People with a food allergy must avoid their allergen. Even just a trace of the food they are allergic to can cause an allergic reaction.

## COMMON ALLERGENS



You can be allergic to any food but most reactions are caused by just 9 foods:



Venom (such as wasp and bee stings), medications, latex, animals and some vaccines can also cause serious allergic reactions.



# HOW PARENTS CAN SUPPORT PUPILS



5% to 7% of children have a food allergy, so it's likely there are pupils in your child's class with a food allergy. There are things you can do to support these children.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP



Learn about food allergies and take them seriously. Talk to your child about what it means to live with a food allergy.



Be allergen aware. If you're bringing food into school (perhaps for a packed lunch or cake sale) and your school has asked you not to bring in a specific ingredient, please take this seriously. It's not always obvious that a food will contain a specific allergen, so read all ingredient and allergy labelling carefully.



Children with allergies may be coping with higher levels of anxiety on a daily basis. Their friends can be their biggest supporters. Encourage your child to be an allergy ally.



If your child is older and it is appropriate, why not encourage them to learn how to deliver potentially life-saving adrenaline in an emergency. [Check out free training from The Allergy Team](https://theallergyteam.com/treating-an-allergic-reaction/) ([theallergyteam.com/treating-an-allergic-reaction/](https://theallergyteam.com/treating-an-allergic-reaction/)).



It's understandable that you might feel nervous if your child has a friend with food allergies who is invited over for a playdate or party. These are some things you can do to help keep them safe and feel included:



Speak to their parent or carer to find out what they are allergic to and find out what foods they need to avoid.



If you're catering, think about all the ingredients that go into your recipes and make sure you read all the ingredient labels on bought produce. Check out some [recipes free from the main allergens](https://theallergyteam.com/the-recipes/) ([theallergyteam.com/the-recipes/](https://theallergyteam.com/the-recipes/)). Be mindful of cross-contamination, e.g. make sure you use clean pans and utensils.



Please don't be offended if the parent/carer wants to send their child to your house with their own food. Sometimes this is more comfortable for everyone, especially if it's the first time they are visiting.



If you're worried about anything, speak to the parent/carer. They are likely to be very happy to help and keen for their child to be included in as many activities as possible.