



For The Early Learning Centre Sector

Nutrition Fact Sheet

The Difference Between Allergies and Intolerances



Food allergies and intolerances are a common issue facing infants and children throughout the world. In Australia, it is estimated that 10% of infants, and 4-8% of children (up to five years of age) have a food allergy, with food intolerances being even more common.

In this fact sheet, we explore the difference between food allergies and intolerances, and strategies to help cater for these diet requirements in the early learning centre environment.

Key Messages -

- Approximately 10% of infants and 4-8% of children (up to five years of age) have a food allergy in Australia.
- Common food allergens in child care include peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, wheat, sesame, soy, fish and shellfish.
- Common food intolerances in child care include lactose and gluten.
- Food allergies tend to cause immediate reactions, which can be life threatening. Whilst, intolerances tend to result in symptoms that occur after several hours and don't tend to be life threatening.
- Certain food allergens must be labelled on all prepackaged food.

FOOD ALLERGIES

Definition: An allergy is an abnormal immune response to certain substances, known as allergens, which are typically harmless to most people.

Common Allergens In Childcare: Common food allergens include peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, wheat, sesame, soy, fish and shellfish.

Reaction: Allergies involve the immune system, which mistakenly identifies harmless substances as treats and triggers defensive response.

Symptoms: Allergic reactions can range from mild to severe and may include hives, itching, swelling, respiratory distress, and in severe cases, anaphylaxis (a life threatening reaction).

Frequency: Reactions occur every time the allergenic food is consumed, and generally within minutes of the food being ingested (however up to a maximum of 2 hours).

FOOD INTOLERANCES

Definition: An intolerance is a non-immune reaction to foods or substances, primarily due to an inability to digest or process them effectively.

Common Intolerances In Childcare: lactose intolerances and gluten intolerances.

Reaction: Intolerances affect the digestive system i.e. bloating, constipation and diarrhoea.

Symptoms: Symptoms include bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhoea or constipation. Unlike allergies, intolerances generally do not cause severe or life threatening reactions.

Frequency: Reactions can differ and may not occur every time the food is consumed. Reactions are not always immediate and can take up to several hours for a reaction to show after consuming the intolerant food.



MANAGING FOOD ALLERGIES AND INTOLERANCES

The most effective way to manage food allergies and intolerances is to completely avoid the allergic/intolerant food.

Since December 2002, the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code requires food labels to declare certain common allergens and intolerances in packaged food, such as cereals that contain gluten, shellfish, eggs, milk, tree nuts, peanuts, soybeans and sulphites (10mg/kg or more).

Food must be declared if it used as:

- An ingredient
- Is part of a compound ingredient
- Is a food additive or part of a food additive
- Is used in processing.

Common food allergies/intolerances are listed in bold in the ingredients list (see image below).

What about 'may contain' statements? May contain statements are used to explain that during food processing the product may have been unintentionally contaminated with an allergen.

When catering for individuals with allergic reactions to a particular ingredient, packaged food that indicates that it may contain an allergenic ingredient, should be avoided.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR CATERING STAFF

Communication - Maintaining open and clear channels of communication with parents or guardians to obtain accurate and up to date information regarding any known allergies and intolerances.

Ingredient awareness - Being familiar with common allergens and substances that may cause intolerances to ensure proper food presentation and avoid any cross contamination.

Ingredient labelling - Carefully reading ingredient labels of prepackaged food items to identify potential allergens or substances that could trigger intolerances.

Separation of foods - Preventing cross contamination by storing and preparing allergen free or intolerances safe foods separately from these containing potential allergens.

Training - Ensuring that all staff members receive appropriate training on allergen management, emergency procedures and the use of epinephrine auto-injectors, if necessary.

SUMMARY

The prevalence of allergies and intolerances is generally higher during early childhood. Therefore it is crucial to thoroughly read nutrition labels and ingredient lists to identify potential allergens and avoid cross-contamination.

Although approximately two-thirds of children tend to outgrow food allergies and intolerances as they mature, the initial years of life are important for carefully managing dietary choices to prevent any adverse reactions in individuals with allergies and intolerances.

Statement of Ingredients

Ingredients:
Water, vegetable oil, vinegar, sugar, tomato paste, capsicum, salt, **egg** yolk, thickener (1412), **almonds**, parmesan cheese (**milk**), garlic, wheat flour, flavour (wheat maltodextrin, **sesame** oil) antioxidant (320).

Summary statement

Contains: egg, almond, milk, wheat, gluten, sesame.

Source: 2021 Food Industry Guide to Allergens Management and Labelling for Australia and New Zealand

For more information, please visit:

Allergy 250K - Food Allergy and Packaged Foods:
<https://allergy250kteens.org.au/food-allergy-and-packaged-foods/>
Healthy Kids Association - Food Allergies and Intolerances:
<https://healthy-kids.com.au/food-nutrition/food-intolerances/>

