

By: Alisha Fisher

K-State Research and Extension Greenwood County

Family and Community Wellness Extension Agent

*“Food Allergies 101”*

More than half of Americans have a food-related sensitivity. While most food allergies are diagnosed in childhood at least 15% of patients are first diagnosed in adulthood. The top nine food allergens include milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish, shellfish, and sesame. Tree nuts, peanuts, milk and shellfish are the most frequently reported food allergens. Diagnosing a food allergy early and strict avoidance of the food allergen is the best way to manage serious health issues.

A food allergy reaction does not happen just at home, school, or a restaurant it can happen anywhere, including the workplace. Using a shared kitchen, eating at a party, or traveling can expose you to food allergens. Symptoms of an allergic reaction include hives, coughing, swelling of the face and tongue, difficulty breathing, and loss of consciousness. Anaphylaxis is characterized by difficulty breathing, swelling, low blood pressure, and rapid heart rate. This is the most serious reaction and requires an epinephrine injection immediately to stop the reaction.

Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA) and the Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education and Research Act of 2021 (FASTER) required food manufacturers to list any of the nine major food allergens on package labels. Allergens that might be less known by another name have to be listed with the common name in parentheses, for example, lecithin (soy), flour (wheat), and whey (milk) or the common names need to be named after the ingredient list by saying statements such as “contains soy, wheat, and milk”.

If you experience a reaction to a food, seek medical attention immediately. The best way to determine if you have a food allergy is to get a medical diagnosis. Testing options include an oral food challenge, skin prick tests, blood tests or a diet that eliminated certain foods. The oral food challenge is the most accurate way to diagnose a food allergy. Never try to self-diagnose a food allergy. Some children may outgrow food allergies to milk, soy, eggs, and wheat, but always make sure to consult with a medical professional before adding these foods back into a diet.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.