

# Information for Patients & Families

## Food Labelling & 'May Contain' Products



Being diagnosed with a food allergy can lead to considerable stress and worry about how best to avoid the offending food. This leaflet outlines food labelling laws in the UK and describes the meaning of 'may contain traces' food labelling.

### Common allergens that require labelling by law

All pre-packaged food made with common food allergens must be clearly labelled with the name of the allergen in the ingredients list. This ONLY applies for the common allergens listed below:

<i>Milk</i>	<i>Sesame</i>	<i>Egg</i>	<i>Shellfish – scampi, prawns</i>
<i>Peanut*</i>	<i>Fish</i>	<i>Nuts**</i>	<i>Molluscs</i>
<i>Soya</i>	<i>Mustard</i>	<i>Celery</i>	<i>Sulphites</i>
<i>Lupin</i>	<i>Cereals containing gluten (wheat, rye, barley)</i>		

\*Peanuts must be called peanuts – other names for peanut should not be used.

\*\*Food that contains tree nuts such as almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, cashews, pecans, brazil nuts, pistachios, macadamia nuts must be listed on the ingredient list. Pine nuts (a seed), coconut (a palm) and chestnuts (a tree nut) are not under the same regulation and do not have to be listed.

Please check product labels carefully every time. If you have an allergy to a food which is not on this list (such as lentils, chickpea or kiwi fruit for instance) it will not be highlighted as an allergen, but should be included on the products ingredients list.

Please be aware if you are on holiday or buying foods produced outside Europe these rules will not apply. **Allergy UK** provide a [translation card service](#) that can be used in restaurants abroad to make staff aware of your child's allergy.

### 'May contain' Products

Some companies use the term 'may contain' on their food labels. This means that even though an ingredient has not been deliberately included in the food, the manufacturer cannot be certain that the product doesn't accidentally contain traces. These warnings should always be taken seriously, but they don't tell you anything about the level of risk associated with eating that particular food.

Some people with food allergies only eat food that has been prepared in an entirely allergen free environment. Many families do this successfully. However, so many foods are labelled 'may contain' that this can be very restrictive.

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Some families choose to manage 'may contain' products by carefully assessing the risk and following these four rules:

### 1) Check the product every time

Just because a child has eaten a particular food in the past and not had an allergic reaction does not mean that the food will always be safe to eat. Recipes change and the food they are allergic to may have been added to the ingredients.

### 2) Don't eat 'may contain' products when unwell

The amount of a food that someone who is allergic needs to eat to cause an allergic reaction is called the threshold. This varies, as does the severity of a reaction they may have to the same amount of the food. Things that can lower this threshold include strenuous exercise, drinking alcohol, being unwell (for any reason) or symptoms of asthma or hay fever. At these times it is advisable to avoid foods labelled 'may contain'.

### 3) Make sure that there is access to help

Make sure that the child is in a place where an ambulance can be called and can arrive promptly. Some families choose to eat traces only at home for this reason and avoid all 'may contain' products outside the family home

### 4) Make sure the child/young person's rescue medication is with them

The child/young person should always carry their oral antihistamine and adrenaline auto-injector with them at all times.

## Foods without packaging

Changes to the regulations from December 2014 mean that information must be provided on allergens in foods sold without packaging or wrapped on site. This includes foods sold at supermarkets, delis, cafes and restaurants. This information could be written on a menu board or provided verbally by a member of staff. Where the specific allergen information is not provided upfront, clear signposting to where this information could be obtained must be provided. If unsure, ask a member of staff.

Be aware that these regulations do not cover allergens present following accidental contamination. Sometimes small amounts of the food you need to avoid may have come into contact with another food. For example, nuts and seeds falling off baked items, or the same serving spoon being used for multiple products at a deli or ice cream counter. For this reason it is important ask staff if there are measures in place to prevent cross-contamination.

**Remember!** Rescue medicines (antihistamine and adrenaline pens) should be with the child/young person at all times!