



# Wheat

One of the nine most  
common food allergens



## Allergic reactions

**Allergic reactions are severe adverse reactions that occur when the body's immune system overreacts to a particular allergen. These reactions may be caused by food, insect stings, latex, medications and other substances. In Canada, the nine priority food allergens are peanuts, tree nuts, sesame seeds, milk, eggs, seafood (fish, crustaceans and shellfish), soy, wheat and sulphites (a food additive).**

### What are the symptoms of an allergic reaction?

When someone comes in contact with an allergen, the symptoms of a reaction may develop quickly and rapidly progress from mild to severe. The most severe form of an allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis. Symptoms can include breathing difficulties, a drop in blood pressure or shock, which may result in loss of consciousness and even death. A person experiencing an allergic reaction may have **any** of the following symptoms:

- Flushed face, hives or a rash, red and itchy skin
- Swelling of the eyes, face, lips, throat and tongue
- Trouble breathing, speaking or swallowing
- Anxiety, distress, faintness, paleness, sense of doom, weakness
- Cramps, diarrhea, vomiting
- A drop in blood pressure, rapid heart beat, loss of consciousness

### How are food allergies and severe allergic reactions treated?

Currently there is no cure for food allergies. The only option is complete avoidance of the specific allergen. Appropriate emergency treatment for anaphylaxis (a severe food allergy reaction) includes an injection of adrenaline, which is available in an auto-injector device. Adrenaline must be administered as soon as symptoms of a severe allergic reaction appear. The injection must be followed by further treatment and observation in a hospital emergency room. If your allergist has diagnosed you with a food allergy and prescribed adrenaline, carry it with you all the time and know how to use it. Follow your allergist's advice on how to use an auto-injector device.

## Frequently asked questions about wheat allergies

### I have a wheat allergy. How can I avoid a wheat-related reaction?

Avoid all food and products that contain wheat and wheat derivatives. These include any product whose ingredient list warns it “may contain” or “may contain traces of” wheat.

### What is the difference between a wheat allergy and celiac disease?

Wheat allergy and celiac disease are two different conditions. When someone has a wheat allergy his/her immune system has an abnormal reaction to proteins from wheat, with symptoms similar to that of other allergic food reactions. When a person with celiac disease eats food containing the protein gluten (found in wheat and some other grains) it damages the lining of the small intestine, which stops the body from absorbing nutrients. This can lead to diarrhea, weight loss and eventually malnutrition. If you are unsure whether you have a wheat allergy or celiac disease, consult an allergist or a physician.

### How can I determine if a product contains wheat or wheat derivatives?

Always read the ingredient list carefully. Wheat and wheat derivatives can often be present under different names, e.g., semolina. For other common ingredient label names, refer to the list below.

### What do I do if I am not sure whether a product contains wheat or wheat derivatives?

If you have a wheat allergy, do not eat or use the product. Get ingredient information from the manufacturer.

### Does product size affect the likelihood of an allergic reaction?

It does not affect the likelihood of a reaction; however, the same brand of product may be safe to consume for one product size but not another. This is because product formulation may vary between different product sizes of the same product.

## Avoiding wheat and wheat derivatives

Make sure you read product labels carefully to avoid products that contain wheat and wheat derivatives. Avoid food and products that do not have an ingredient list and read labels **every time** you shop. Manufacturers may occasionally change their recipes or use different ingredients for varieties of the same brand. Refer to the following list before shopping:

### Other names for wheat

Atta  
Bulgur  
Couscous  
Durum  
Einkorn  
Emmer  
Enriched/white/whole wheat flour  
Farina  
Gluten  
Graham flour, high gluten/protein flour  
Kamut  
Seitan  
Semolina  
Spelt (dinkel, farro)  
Triticale (a cross between wheat and rye)  
*Triticum aestivum*  
Wheat bran/flour/germ/starch



## Possible sources of wheat

*Note: Avoid all food and products that are made from wheat and/or contain wheat in the ingredient list including baked goods, baking mixes, breads, cakes, cookies, doughnuts, muffins, battered/fried foods, bread crumbs, cereals, crackers, croutons, creamed (thickened) soups, gravy mixes and pasta.*

Baking powder, flour  
Beer  
Coffee substitutes made from cereal  
Chicken and beef broth (canned/cubed)  
Falafel  
Gelatinized starch, modified starch, modified food starch  
Host (communion/altar bread/wafers)  
Hydrolyzed plant protein  
Ice cream  
Imitation bacon  
Meat, fish and poultry binders and fillers, e.g., deli meats, hot dogs, surimi (used to make imitation crab/lobster meat)  
Pie fillings, puddings  
Prepared ketchup, mustard  
Salad dressings  
Sauces, e.g., chutney, soy sauce, tamari sauce  
Seasonings  
Snack foods, e.g., pretzels, candy, chocolate bars

### Non-food sources of wheat

Cosmetics, hair care products  
Medications, vitamins  
Modeling compound e.g., PLAY-DOH®  
Pet food  
Wreath decorations

*Note: These lists are not complete and may change. Food and food products purchased from other countries, through mail-order or the Internet, are not always produced using the same manufacturing and labelling standards as in Canada. For example, some gluten-free products from Europe may contain wheat starch.*

## What can I do?

### Be informed

See an allergist and educate yourself about food allergies. Contact your local allergy association for further information.

If you or anyone you know has food allergies or would like to receive information about food being recalled, sign up for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) free e-mail "Food Recalls and Allergy Alerts" notification service available at [www.inspection.gc.ca/english/tools/listserv/listsube.shtml?foodrecalls\\_rappelsaliments](http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/tools/listserv/listsube.shtml?foodrecalls_rappelsaliments). When you sign up you will automatically receive food recall public warnings.

### Before eating

Allergists recommend that if you **do not have** your auto-injector device with you, that you **do not eat**. If an ingredient list says a product "may contain" or "does contain" wheat or wheat derivatives, do not eat it. If you do not recognize an ingredient or there is no ingredient list available, avoid the product.

## Watch out for allergen cross contamination!

Cross contamination is the transfer of an ingredient (food allergen) to a product that does not normally have that ingredient in it. Through cross contamination, a food that should not contain the allergen could become dangerous to eat for those who are allergic.

Cross contamination can happen:

- during **food manufacturing** through shared production and packaging equipment;
- at **retail** through shared equipment, e.g., cheese and deli meats sliced on the same slicer; and through bulk display of food products, e.g., bins of baked goods, bulk nuts; and
- during **food preparation** at home or in restaurants through equipment, utensils and hands.

## What is the Government of Canada doing about food allergens?

The Government of Canada is committed to providing safe food to all Canadians. The CFIA and Health Canada work closely with municipal, provincial and territorial partners and industry to meet this goal.

The CFIA enforces Canada's labelling laws and works with associations, distributors, food manufacturers and importers to ensure complete and appropriate labelling of all foods. The CFIA recommends that food companies establish effective allergen controls to prevent the occurrence of undeclared allergens and cross-contamination. The CFIA has developed guidelines and tools to aid them in developing these controls. When the CFIA becomes aware of a potential serious hazard associated with a food, such as undeclared allergens, the food product is recalled from the marketplace and a public warning is issued. The CFIA has also published several advisories to industry and consumers regarding allergens in food.

Health Canada has worked with the medical community, consumer associations, and the food industry to enhance labelling regulations for priority allergens, gluten sources and sulphites in pre-packaged food sold in Canada. Health Canada is proposing to amend the *Food and Drug Regulations* to require that the most common food and food ingredients that cause life-threatening or severe allergic reactions are always identified by their common names allowing consumers to easily recognize them.

*The Government of Canada is committed to providing safe food to all Canadians. The CFIA and Health Canada work closely with municipal, provincial and territorial partners and industry to meet this goal.*

## Where can I get more information?

For more information on:

- food allergies;
  - ordering free copies of this pamphlet; and
  - subscribing to the free "Food Recalls and Allergy Alerts" e-mail notification service,
- visit the CFIA Website at [www.inspection.gc.ca](http://www.inspection.gc.ca) or call **1 800 442-2342/TTY 1 800 465-7735** (8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday to Friday).

Below are some organizations that can provide additional allergy information:

Allergy/Asthma Information Association [www.aaia.ca](http://www.aaia.ca)  
Anaphylaxis Canada [www.anaphylaxis.ca](http://www.anaphylaxis.ca)  
Association québécoise des allergies alimentaires  
[www.aqaa.qc.ca](http://www.aqaa.qc.ca) (French only)  
Canadian Celiac Association [www.celiac.ca](http://www.celiac.ca)  
Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology  
[www.csaci.medical.org](http://www.csaci.medical.org) (English only)  
Health Canada [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

*Developed in consultation with Allergy/Asthma Information Association, Anaphylaxis Canada, Association québécoise des allergies alimentaires, Canadian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology and Health Canada.*