

The Food Allergy History: the key to diagnosis  
 Maria Crain, CPNP, AE-C  
 Children's Medical Center Dallas

Learning Objectives

- Explain the difference between food intolerance and IgE-mediated food allergy
- Explain the importance of taking a food allergy history
- List questions that should be asked during a food allergy history
- Be familiar with questions that should be asked for each food group

For each food, ask these specific questions:

Question	Possible significance
What is the suspected food allergen?	Consider whether the allergen is typical for patient's age/population
Was the suspected food allergen ingested, inhaled, or touched?	A proportion of patients have a reaction after inhalation or contact with the allergen
How soon after exposure to the suspected food allergen did the symptoms occur?	IgE-mediated allergic reactions usually occur within 20 minutes after the exposure and certainly within 2 hours after the exposure
What are the specific symptoms and how severe are they?	If symptoms are not typical, consider differential
How long did it take for the symptoms to resolve?	The typical time to symptom resolution is 4-12 hours
How reproducible are the symptoms with previous or subsequent ingestion?	A patient is unlikely to have a reaction to a food just one time
Does exercise precipitate symptoms?	May indicate food dependent, exercise induced anaphylaxis

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Most common food allergens-Milk, Egg, Wheat, Soybean, Peanuts, Tree nuts, and Seafood

Take a diet history to complete the food allergy history:

Milk	Ask about milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, baked goods
Egg	Ask about fried, scrambled, hardboiled, merengue, pancakes, waffles, French toast and baked goods
Wheat	Ask about bread, crackers, pasta, pizza-Flour is wheat!
Soybean	Ask about soy milks, yogurt, cheese, edamame, & tofu. Soy lecithin and soy oil is usually tolerated even with soy allergy
Peanuts	Ask about peanuts, peanut butter, candies
Tree nuts	Ask about almonds, brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pistachios, walnuts, & pine nuts
Seafood	Ask about finned fish, shellfish and mollusks
Less Common Allergens	Legumes, Seeds, Meats, Fruits/Vegetables

