**Living With a Peanut or Tree Nut Allergy**

If [allergy skin testing](http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/allergy-tests.html) shows that someone has a peanut or tree nut allergy, a doctor will provide guidelines on what to do.

The best way to prevent a reaction in someone with a nut allergy is to avoid peanuts and tree nuts. Avoiding nuts means more than just not eating them. It also means not eating any foods that might contain tree nuts or peanuts as ingredients.

The best way to be sure a food is nut free is to [***read the label***](http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/food-labels.html). Manufacturers of foods sold in the United States must state on their labels whether foods contain peanuts or tree nuts. Check the ingredients list first.

After checking the ingredients list, look on the label for phrases like these:

  **"may contain nuts"**

* **"produced on shared equipment with nuts or peanuts"**

People who are allergic to nuts also have to avoid foods with these statements on the label. Although these foods might not use nut ingredients, the warnings are there to let people know the food *may* contain small traces of nuts. That can happen through something called "cross-contamination," when nuts get into a food product because it is made or served in a place that uses nuts in other foods.

Some of the highest-risk foods for people with peanut or tree nut allergy include:

* **Cookies and baked goods.** Even if baked goods don't contain nut ingredients, it is possible that they came into contact with peanut or tree nuts through cross-contamination. Unless you know exactly what went into a food and where it was made, it's safest to avoid store-bought or bakery cookies and other baked goods.
* **Candy.** Candies made by small bakeries or manufacturers (or homemade candies) may contain nuts as a hidden ingredient. The safest plan is to eat only candies made by major manufacturers whose labels show they are safe.
* **Ice cream.** Unfortunately, cross-contamination is common in ice cream parlors because of shared scoops. It's also a possibility in soft-serve ice cream, custard, water ice, or yogurt places because the same dispensing machine and utensils are often used for lots of different flavors. Instead, do as you would for candy: Buy tubs of ice cream at the supermarket and be sure they're made by a large manufacturer and the labels indicate they're safe.
* **Asian, African, and other cuisine.** African and Asian (especially Thai, Chinese, and Indian) foods often contain peanuts or tree nuts. Mexican and Mediterranean foods may also use nuts, so the risk of cross-contamination is high with these foods.
* **Sauces.** Many cooks use peanuts or peanut butter to thicken chili and other sauces.

**Always proceed with caution,** even if you are used to eating a particular food. Even if you've eaten a food in the past, manufacturers sometimes change their processes — for example, switching suppliers to a company that uses shared equipment. And two foods that seem the same might also have differences in their manufacturing.

Here are some other precautions you can take:

* Be on the watch for cross-contamination that can happen on kitchen surfaces and utensils — everything from knives and cutting boards to the toaster. Make sure the knife another family member used to make peanut butter sandwiches is not used to butter your bread and that nut breads are not toasted in the same toaster you use.
* Avoid cooked foods you didn't make yourself — anything with an unknown list of ingredients.
* Tell everyone who handles the food you eat, from relatives to restaurant wait staff, that you have a nut allergy. If the manager or owner of a restaurant is uncomfortable about your request for peanut- or nut-free food preparation, don't eat there.
* Make school lunches and snacks at home where you can control the preparation.
* Be sure your school knows about your allergy and has an action plan in place for you.
* Keep rescue medicine **(including epinephrine)** on hand at all times — not in your locker, but in a pocket, purse, or book bag that's with you.