



[MARKETPLACE \(/ADVOCATE/CATEGORY/MARKETPLACE\)](#)

Warning: Shrimp salad may contain shrimp

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Seafood industry measures build on labeling to minimize allergy issues

Allergies and their effects on consumers are playing a much larger role in the food industry than ever before. New laws are coming all over the world, so be warned, get your knowledge updated and be ready for the challenges.

It is a fact that some 95 percent of all chronic diseases have an inflammatory component. All humans have what is known as "gut integrity," which thwarts or creates the stage for food sensitivity, immune dysfunction, inflammation and chronic disease. Defining and amending your diet by avoiding foods that cause inflammation can be an important part of breaking the cycle of chronic inflammation and improving outcomes.



Shrimp and other seafoods are delicious and nutritious, but can cause allergic reactions in a small percentage of the population.

Allergies

Allergies are an immune system response. Cells that line the skin, gut, lungs, nose and eyes are designed to kill invading allergens. These cells contain antibodies that act to detect allergens. When an allergen is detected, the cells are triggered to dump their contents (including histamine) into the tissues, causing an allergic reaction.

Sometimes our bodies mistake food as an invader and send antibodies to fight it. Typical symptoms present within four hours and may include runny nose, itchy mouth or eyes, or hives.

At the severe end of these issues is anaphylaxis, an allergic reaction that is potentially life threatening. Although deaths from food allergies are rare, extreme caution is essential.

Anaphylactic attacks commonly occur within minutes of eating the allergenic food, and they affect the whole body. Symptoms can include difficult or noisy breathing, wheezing or persistent coughing, difficulty speaking or a hoarse voice, swelling of the tongue or throat, pale skin, dizziness or loss of consciousness.

Generally, while food allergies can develop at any age, it is estimated that only 1 to 2 percent of the population suffers some kind of food allergy. Food allergies are most common in young children, affecting an estimated 4 to 6 percent of children up to 6 years old. However, most food allergies affecting children are not severe, and children commonly grow out of them.

Some populations are more susceptible to allergies than others. Common food allergens include milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (walnuts, pecans and almonds), wheat, soy, fish and shellfish.

Food intolerance

Many people who believe they have a food allergy actually suffer from food intolerance, which is very different from food allergies. Food intolerance involves the inability of the body to digest a food. The symptoms of food intolerance are generally minor in nature – for example, headaches, wheezing, runny nose, hives, bloating, or stomach or bowel upsets. In comparison, the symptoms of an allergic reaction to food can be very serious and potentially life threatening.

Examples of types of food intolerance include lactose intolerance, milk intolerance, food additive intolerance and intolerance of sulfites.

One disease we hear much more about today is coeliac disease. This autoimmune disease occurs in genetically predisposed persons. It is a disorder of the small bowel caused by an immune reaction to dietary gluten, but it is not a food allergy. It occurs when the lining of the bowel is damaged by the white blood cells of the immune system and not by antibodies, as in food allergies.

Failure of the body to eliminate gluten from the diet leads to chronic inflammation and damage to the lining of the small intestine. The tissue damage results in certain nutrients not being properly absorbed by the body, and possible serious complications can result that involve multiple organ systems and increased risk of some malignancies. Symptoms of coeliac disease include nausea, constipation, tiredness, reduced growth and skin problems.

Common causes of allergies

Any food that contains protein has the potential to cause allergic reactions in some individuals. However, eight foods account for 90 percent of all food allergies worldwide, although some regional and country-specific differences exist. These eight offenders are wheat, peanuts, soybeans, milk, eggs, tree nuts, crustaceans and fish. New allergens also continue to emerge.

Sesame has recently been recognized as a new food allergen in some countries. Lupin, a legume related to peanuts and soy, is another emerging allergen. Lupin has a high level of protein and dietary fiber and a low fat content, which makes it attractive for human nutrition. Lupin is increasingly used in food products worldwide.

Prevention

Our digestive tracts need healthy bacteria such as *Bifidobacteria* and *Acidophilus* to maintain health and integrity. Digestive systems are responsible not only for food digestion, but nervous, hormonal and immune functions, as well. Evidence from many clinical tests highlights that 60 to 70 percent of the immune system resides in the large intestine, emphasizing the importance of intestinal health.

Establishing and maintaining good gut bacteria is a constant battle for all. In today's world, our systems are continually exposed to pathogens, pesticides in foods, antibiotics, food-triggered sensitivities, processed foods, varied environmental issues and stress. Maintaining good gut health takes a daily regimen of eating healthfully, stress reduction and eliminating food sensitivities.

Regulations

As new foods and ingredients enter the food supply, and new allergens emerge, the allergens will need to be considered for mandatory declaration on food labels. Since lists of food allergens vary among countries, there is a need for an internationally consistent approach – something the seafood industry could proactively apply to assist consumers.

In Europe, regulations for allergen labeling changed in December 2014 and incorporated a requirement for giving specific menu advice for consumers. Without wanting to belittle either the regulators or the consumers, it needs to be stated that sometimes we just go “over the top.” The case of a menu statement such as “shrimp salad may contain shrimp” is one of those moments – surely if you were allergic to shrimp, you would simply avoid that menu choice and not have to be told a shrimp selection could contain that seafood.

Recommendations

Whatever seafood or food business you are in now, it would be a good idea to check the laws, especially those related to labeling, in the areas where you operate or sell goods, as these rules are constantly updated. Ignorance is no excuse if you are implicated.

Constantly stress the importance of keeping staff informed with accurate information about the ingredients in food, as they are an important connection to end consumers. If food is contaminated with an allergen, inform your staff and customers of this risk.

When handling foods that contain known allergens, take extra care not to contaminate other foods or equipment. Define a specific time period and/or work area solely for use in the preparation of allergen-free foods and maintain separate utensils for this use. It is essential to ensure that staff clean and sanitize all equipment and surfaces that come into contact with allergens, so include special instructions in cleaning schedules to prevent cross-contamination during cleaning.

When identifying food for display or menus, include known allergens or specific ingredients in the descriptions – for example, “fish with almond butter.” Make sure information on allergens is easily accessible by serving staff for when a customer makes an inquiry.

If customers request food suitable for special dietary requirements, you must ensure your business provides this. As a safeguard, keep a copy of the ingredient information for any foods that have been removed from their original packaging. When displaying unwrapped food, you might need to follow further instructions to keep ahead of the regulations.

Consumer advice

We are all consumers, so the main advice for ourselves and other consumers with a food allergy is to always read the label on packaged food. When eating out, do not be afraid to ask questions in relation to the possible presence of allergens. As outlined above, it is food businesses' responsibility to provide this advice upon request.

Always advise retail or restaurant staff of allergies prior to ordering food. If you have a severe allergy, it's best to avoid food from a self-service area or buffet. It's easy for small amounts of allergenic ingredients to get into food by accident because people may use the same serving utensils for different dishes. Also, do not share straws, cups, cutlery or other food utensils.

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