

How to Avoid Cross-Contact With Food Allergens

This sheet will help you avoid cross-contact and prevent a food allergy reaction.



What is cross-contact?

Cross-contact is when an unsafe food (the allergen) mixes with a safe food (food that does not contain the allergen). When this happens the safe food then contains tiny amounts of the unsafe food. The amounts can be so small that you cannot see them. Even if you cannot see the allergen, you can still have an allergic reaction to it.

What's the difference between cross-contact and cross-contamination?

Cross-contamination is when bacteria or viruses get in your food and make it unsafe to eat. When this happens, cooking the food removes the bacteria or virus and lowers your chances of getting sick.

This is not the same as cross-contact with food allergens. **The cooking process does not remove allergens from food.**

What are some examples of cross-contact?



- **Direct cross-contact:** For example, if croutons are added to a salad, then taken out, direct cross-contact has occurred and the food allergen remains on the other ingredients.



- **Indirect cross-contact:** A cooking utensil, hands, or a food-preparation surface that has or had the food you are allergic to on it is used to prepare a safe food—one you are not allergic to. Now the safe food has unsafe food in it.

What can you do to prevent cross-contact?

To prevent cross-contact:

- ✓ Always read food labels to ensure the allergen is not present in the food before you start.
- ✓ Wash utensils, cutting boards, and cooking pans with soap and water before and after you use them.
- ✓ Use separate utensils and dishes for allergy-safe foods. You can use a different color for safe kitchen tools.
- ✓ Cook allergy-safe foods first if you need to cook several foods.
- ✓ Keep allergy-safe foods covered and away from other foods.
- ✓ If you make a mistake, you cannot remove an allergen from a meal. Even a trace amount of cross-contact makes a food unsafe. You must start again.
- ✓ If you touch an allergen, wash your hands with soap and water before you touch anything else. Hand sanitizer or water by itself will not remove allergens.
- ✓ Clean counters and tables with soap and water or disinfectant cleaner and single-use (or disposable) towel. Wash all utensils, pots, and pans in dishwasher or use hot water and soap. Let them air dry.
- ✓ Do not share food, drinks, or utensils. Teach children not to share these when they are at school or with friends.

What are the most common food allergens in the U.S.?

In the U.S. there are 9 major food allergens that cause about 90% of reactions, but a person could be allergic to any food. The top allergens include:

- Crustacean Shellfish (This includes shrimp, crab, or lobster but not scallops, clams, mussels, or oysters)
- Egg
- Finned fish (such as tuna or salmon)
- Milk
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts (such as almond, cashew, or walnut)
- Sesame
- Soy
- Wheat



To learn more about keeping safe with food allergies, go to: <https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies>