

How to Read Food Labels if You Have Food Allergies

You must read the labels of all foods you eat to make sure they do not include foods or ingredients you are allergic to. This sheet will help you read and understand food labels.



What major food allergens **MUST** be listed on the food label?



In the U.S. there are 9 major food allergens that must be listed. These include:

- Crustacean Shellfish (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

What foods **MUST** have major food allergens listed on the label?

All **packaged** foods sold in the U.S. are required by law to list the major food allergen ingredient if they:

- Have an ingredient that is a major food allergen
- Include a major food allergen as part of another listed ingredient in the food, such as spice mix or flavoring

INGREDIENTS: Enriched unbleached flour (wheat flour, malted barley flour, ascorbic acid [dough conditioner], niacin, reduced iron, thiamin mononitrate, riboflavin, folic acid), sugar, natural flavor.

CONTAINS: Wheat.

What foods **DON'T** need to list major food allergens on the label?

- Fresh foods, such as meats, poultry, fruit, and vegetables
- Restaurant foods wrapped in a carryout package for a customer (this includes bakeries and delis)
- Highly refined oils (even if they come from a major allergen, like peanut oil or soybean oil)

How are major food allergens shown on food labels?

Food companies have 2 options for how they can include food allergens on labels. Sometimes both options are included on the same label. The options include:

1. Listing the allergen within the ingredient list. Sometimes the allergen's common English name is also included in parentheses. For example: **whey (milk)**.
2. Listing the allergen immediately following the ingredient list using a **"Contains"** statement. When the food allergen is part of a larger group of foods, like tree nuts, the label must also name the specific food included. For example: **Contains: tree nuts (walnut)**.

INGREDIENTS: SEMOLINA (WHEAT), DURUM FLOUR (WHEAT), NIACIN, FERROUS SULFATE (IRON), THIAMIN MONONITRATE, RIBOFLAVIN, FOLIC ACID.

CONTAINS: WHEAT.

MANUFACTURED IN A FACILITY THAT USES EGGS.

Some labels have warnings called precautionary allergen labeling. This includes statements such as **MAY CONTAIN** or **MADE IN A FACILITY WITH**.

Not all food companies use these warnings. Ask your doctor if you should avoid foods with these warnings.

How can I find out about other ingredients I may be allergic to that are not a major allergen?

If an ingredient is not one of the top 9 allergens it may not be listed in the ingredient list by its common name. **For example, corn may be listed as maize instead.**

You can always find out more by calling the food company to ask if a product contains certain allergens. Contact information can be found on the food label or the company website. In some cases, the company may not want to share their recipes.

"Reading food labels is so important if you or someone in your family has a food allergy. I tell my patients to read each label 3 times to make sure the food is safe."

1. Read the label **once** – **when you buy it at the store.**
2. Read the label **again** – **when put it away at home.**
3. Read the label a **third time** – **before you eat or serve it.**



Find more information on living safely with food allergies at [FoodAllergy.org](https://www.foodallergy.org).