

Food Labelling 101

Reading food labels is one of the most important ways to manage a food allergy. If you have a food allergy and/or buy for others that do, carefully read the ingredient list every time.

Priority Food Allergens

In Canada, these priority food allergens must be included on the label of pre-packaged foods:



Peanut



Egg



Milk



Wheat and Triticale



Fish
(e.g. trout, salmon)



Crustaceans
(e.g. lobster, shrimp, crab)



Molluscs
(e.g. scallops, clams, oysters, mussels)

Crustaceans and molluscs are sometimes collectively referred to as shellfish



Sesame



Soy



Mustard



Tree Nuts

Tree nuts include: almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachios, walnuts

According to food labelling regulations, the common name of the priority allergens listed above as well as gluten sources (wheat, triticale, barley, rye, oats) and added sulphites must be included on a food label. More specifically, the type of tree nut (e.g. almonds) and the species of fish (e.g. salmon), crustacean (e.g. shrimp) or mollusc (e.g. clam) must be listed.

Remember that other foods (e.g. meats, fruits, vegetables, grains) can also cause anaphylaxis, but the ones listed here are the most common.

Food Labels

If a priority food allergen, gluten source or added sulphite is an ingredient or part of an ingredient of a food, it must be listed in one of two ways: either in the ingredient list OR in a “Contains” statement that follows the list.

Ingredients: Wheat flour, Rolled oats, Brown sugar, Soybean oil, Whey (milk), Almonds, Honey, Salt, Natural flavour.

OR

Ingredients: Wheat flour, Rolled oats, Brown sugar, Soybean oil, Whey, Almonds, Honey, Salt, Natural flavour.

Contains: Wheat, Oat, Soy, Milk, Almonds.

Tip! Read the list of ingredients from beginning to end, not just the “Contains” statement.

Voluntary Label Statements

Food manufacturers can choose to use the following statements on their products, however, these statements are voluntary and are not part of the Canadian food labelling regulations.

Precautionary statements such as “may contain” can be used by food manufacturers to warn you that a priority allergen may have been added unintentionally during production. People who have a food allergy should avoid products with these statements. Some research has shown that they have contained enough allergen to cause an allergic reaction.

Ingredients: Wheat flour, Rolled oats, Brown sugar, Soybean oil, Whey (milk), Almonds, Honey, Salt, Natural flavour.

May contain egg.



“Free from” statements such as “peanut free” or “milk free” can also be used by food manufacturers. They should be carefully reviewed as they do not replace the need to read the ingredient list.

Reading Food Labels

Read the ingredient list and the precautionary statements every time - even if it's a product that you use often. Sometimes the ingredients of a product change, differ depending on the size or format of the brand, or a precautionary statement is added.

When you review food labels for allergens, do the “Triple Check” and read the label three times:

1. Before buying
2. Before putting away
3. Before serving

If someone in your family has a food allergy:

- Do not buy foods without an ingredient list.
- Do not buy foods with ingredients in a language you do not understand.
- Avoid foods from bulk bins.
- Avoid foods with statements such as “may contain”.
- Review any “free from” statements.
- Call the company if you are unsure about the labelling.
- Be careful with imported foods since labelling regulations vary by country.

Remember, reading food labels every time can help prevent reactions to the allergens which must be avoided by you and/or others you buy for.