



## **DEPARTMENT OF ALLERGY & IMMUNOLOGY**

### **ROYAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL, MELBOURNE**

## **TREE NUT ALLERGY**

The term tree nuts is commonly used to mean nuts other than peanut and includes - cashew, walnut, almond, pecan, pistachio, brazil nut, hazelnut, macadamia and pinenut. These nuts contain protein that can cause an allergic reaction for a small number of children. The type and severity of reactions to tree nuts can vary. Milder reactions are most common and consist of hives, eczema, abdominal pain and vomiting. More sensitive children can develop anaphylaxis. This is a reaction that involves the breathing system and the heart system and can involve difficulty breathing, throat swelling or a drop in blood pressure. In Australia peanuts and treenuts, particularly cashew, are the most common foods to cause anaphylaxis.

The only proven treatment for tree nut allergies is strict avoidance. Although tree nuts are a good source of protein, iron and some vitamins, removing them from the diet has little affect on overall nutritional intake for most children. Avoiding nuts can be problematic as nut containing ingredients can be included in unlikely food products.

### **Why does my child have to avoid various nuts?**

People who are allergic to one tree nut have a tendency to be allergic to other treenuts. Your doctor will tell you which nuts you should avoid based on allergy testing, your child's age and severity of reactions.

- Some allergy doctors may initially recommend avoidance of all nuts until each nut has been individually allergy tested and/or food challenges are done.
- Initial avoidance of all nuts may also be recommended for young children (<2yrs), because of choking risk and if correct nut identification is problematic with other carers involved such as crèche and other family members.
- Severely sensitive children may also be advised to avoid peanut and all tree nuts due to the possibility of nut substitution in commercial food products, contamination during processing or generic nut labeling on products.

### **Will my child grow out of their allergy?**

Only around 10% of children with tree nut allergy will outgrow it. The doctors will determine whether your child has grown out of their allergy by a combination of skin testing and food challenge. Skin tests may be periodically repeated to monitor your child's allergies. Challenges should only be performed by experienced medical staff with emergency resuscitation medications and facilities available.

**The Department of Allergy and Immunology**  
Royal Children's Hospital, Flemington Rd, PARKVILLE 3052  
Telephone: 61 (03)9345 5701 Fax: 61 (03) 9345 4848  
Email:allergy.clinic@rch.org.au

## AVOIDING TREE NUTS

<p><b>Sources of Tree nuts</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nut butters or pastes</li> <li>• Chocolate Spreads eg Nutella (Hazelnut)</li> <li>• Nut biscuits such as Amaretto, Macaroons, Florentines –(Almond)</li> <li>• Crushed nuts on top of cakes, fruit buns, ice cream and desserts (can be peanut or other nuts)</li> <li>• Baklava, Greek pastry (walnut or peanut)</li> <li>• Nut filled chocolates (can be peanut or other nuts)</li> <li>• Waldorf salad (Walnuts)</li> <li>• Praline or fine nut product added to desserts and chocolates (usually hazelnut)</li> <li>• Marzipan icing, confectionary or cake decorations (usually almond based)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Common Sources of treenuts that should be checked carefully</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muesli and breakfast cereal</li> <li>• Muesli bars and health bars</li> <li>• Energy mixes or trail mix</li> <li>• Fruit crumble mix</li> <li>• Christmas Cakes and puddings</li> <li>• Fruit cake icing</li> <li>• Friands and flourless cakes (often contain almond meal)</li> <li>• Nougat, fudge and Turkish delight</li> <li>• Pesto (can contain pinenut, peanut or cashew)</li> <li>• Flavoured cheeses</li> <li>• Vegetarian meals</li> <li>• Asian style meals</li> <li>• Salad dressings</li> <li>• Textured or hydrolysed vegetable protein</li> <li>• Natural flavourings</li> </ul>
<p><b>Products at high risk of being contaminated with treenuts</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chocolate (see information on nut free chocolate below)</li> <li>• Asian style meals</li> <li>• Commercial biscuits and ice creams</li> <li>• Commercial breakfast cereal</li> <li>• Commercial ice creams</li> <li>• Restaurant or takeaway meals</li> </ul>
<p><b>Non-food sources of treenut</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Animal and bird feeds</li> <li>• Cosmetics and massage oils</li> </ul>

### Do I need to avoid the following foods when I have a nut allergy?

Food	Does it need to be avoided?
<b>Nut oils</b>	Refined nut oils (not cold pressed) have been shown to be safe for people with nut allergies as the protein is removed during processing. Unfortunately it can be difficult to determine how well the oil is processed. It is best to avoid nut oils if you have a severe allergy.
<b>Coconut and Nutmeg</b>	<b>NO.</b> Coconut comes from the seed of the palm and nutmeg is obtained from the seed of the drupaceous fruit.
<b>Water chestnuts</b>	<b>NO.</b> Despite the name water chestnuts are not a nut and come from the edible portion of a plant root.
<b>Beans, legumes and pulses</b>	<b>NO.</b> Although soy, lentils and peas come from the same family as peanuts, the majority of peanut allergic people can eat these foods safely.
<b>Sesame Seeds</b>	Not always, although an allergy to sesame seed is common in people with a peanut allergy. Hummus dip and tahini contain sesame seeds.

## LABEL READING

### Ingredients List

All packaged foods must have an ingredients list. You must check this ingredient list for any ingredients that may contain tree nuts. Since 2002, it has been law that all potential food allergens (peanut, tree nut, seafood, fish, milk, eggs, soybeans and wheat) must be clearly identified, however small the amount.

Example: instead of simply listing praline the ingredients list should read praline (hazelnut). The product may also contain a statement at the end of the ingredients list which states "this product contains treenuts"

**ALWAYS** check the ingredients list every time you buy the food as the ingredients of the product may change. Be aware that other words may be used for nuts in other countries.

**Peanut:** ground nuts, earth nuts, monkey nuts, beer nut

**Hazelnut:** filbert, cob nut

**Macadamia:** Queensland nut, candle nut (macadamia nut is sometimes substituted for candlenut)

**Pecan:** Hickory nut, Mashuga

### "May contain traces of treenut" statements

These statements are used by manufacturers to indicate that the product may be contaminated with nuts through processing and packaging. At present these statements are voluntary and there are no clear guidelines for companies regarding how and when to use them. The wording of the statements makes it very difficult to determine your level of risk and a product that does not contain the statement may be no safer than a product that does. The chances of having a significant allergic reaction through contamination during processing are extremely unlikely. People with severe or anaphylactic reactions should use these products with caution. The only safe alternative is extremely limiting as it would be to not include any commercial food products in your child's diet. For children with severe allergic reactions companies can be contacted directly to explore food processing, packaging and cleaning procedures.

## SOURCES OF CONTAMINATION WITH TREENUTS

- Children with severe reactions to nuts can react as a result of contamination to cooking surfaces and utensils such as knives, kitchen sponges, barbeques and benchtops with nuts.
- Contact with someone who has recently eaten treenuts can also cause a reaction.
- Margarine and butter containers can also be sources of contamination with nut products, particularly nut butters and chocolate hazelnut spread (Nutella).
- Picking nuts out of foods will still leave trace amounts of nut protein in the product and is **not** recommended.

## EATING OUT

Many cuisines can contain treenuts, particularly African, Asian, Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, Indonesian, Mexican and Thai. Eating at restaurants or buying takeaway meals is a common source of accidental exposure to nut. Inform staff when booking at restaurants that you need to avoid treenuts and when ordering clarify ingredients and cooking methods with the waiting staff or chef.

## SCHOOL, PRESCHOOL AND CHILDCARE CENTRES

Children should take their own nut free food with them to school and should be discouraged from swapping or sharing food. The use of nut containing foods in cooking classes and science experiments is discouraged if there are children with severe nut allergies in the class. Pay particular care to arrangements for out of the ordinary events such as school camps, excursions and fetes.

Communication of your child's allergies to teachers and carers through the use of Action Plans is essential.

## CHOCOLATE

Chocolate varieties commonly contain nut and due to manufacturing processes non-nut varieties can be contaminated with nut. At the time of writing this information sheet nut free chocolate products that are made in nut free facilities included:

Sweet William: [www.sweetwilliam.com.au](http://www.sweetwilliam.com.au)

Kinnerton: [www.kinnerton.com.au](http://www.kinnerton.com.au)

Nestle: Rolo, Aero and Mint Patties, [www.nestle.com.au](http://www.nestle.com.au)

### For further information refer to:

**ASCIA** (The Australian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy) is the peak professional body of Clinical Immunologists and Allergists in Australia and New Zealand.

Their website contains a wide range of information including Guidelines for prevention of food anaphylactic reactions in schools, preschools and childcare centres and Action plans

[www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

**Anaphylaxis Australia:** a non-profit organisation that provides information, training and support. Membership provides you with access to local support groups and seminars, quarterly newsletters and discounts on resources. Website contains outlines on each states policy on managing food allergies in schools, preschools and childcare facilities.

[www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)

FSANZ (Food Standards Australia and New Zealand): for information on food labeling  
[www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)

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Telephone: 61 (03)9345 5701 Fax: 61 (03) 9345 4848  
Email: [allergy.clinic@rch.org.au](mailto:allergy.clinic@rch.org.au)