

Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, York Region Health Services

Peanut/nut SAFE environments

Why has my child asked me to avoid sending peanut and/or nut products for lunches and snacks?

Most likely, there are children in the school, daycare or camp who have a peanut/nut allergy. Peanut/nut allergies can be severe and may be fatal. Even tiny amounts of peanut/nut particles or residue can cause someone with a peanut/nut allergy to have a strong reaction. Without treatment, this person could die within minutes. “Peanut/Nut-Safe” environments can only be achieved when everyone is committed. That’s why your help and cooperation are very important.

Why am I being asked to avoid sending **both** peanuts and nuts?

Peanuts are *not* the same as other nuts because they are actually members of the legume family. Other nuts such as walnuts, cashews, almonds, etc., are “tree” nuts. However, one third of children with peanut allergies have a “tree nut” allergy as well ¹. Also, peanuts are often processed in facilities which pack “tree nuts”, so there is a risk that “tree nuts” may carry some peanut protein residue on them. Some children are so sensitive to peanuts, that even this small amount may present a problem for them.

What do I do?

The most important thing you can do is to avoid sending any foods from home that may contain peanuts and/or nuts. Check the ingredient list for **peanut oil, peanut butter, peanut sauce, peanut flour, peanut meal, mixed nuts, ground nuts, goober nuts, goober peas, artificial nuts and mandalona nuts**. There are many hidden sources of peanuts/nuts in foods. Some examples include cookies, chocolate, granola bars, some cereal bars, and some vegetable oils and shortening.

How do I know if a food contains peanuts or nuts?

- ✓ Read the labels to see if peanuts/nuts are present.
- ✓ Check the list of ingredients **each time** you buy a product. Remember, ingredients may change.
- ✓ Look for “may contain peanuts/nuts” on the label.
- ✓ Try to avoid products that do not carry a list of ingredients.
- ✓ Imported, non-Canadian products have different labeling requirements, so read the label carefully when choosing these products.

¹Weisnagel, J. www.allerg.qc.ca/peanutallergy.htm, 1998

What does it mean when the label says “may contain peanuts”?

The food industry is allowed to voluntarily label products with the statement “may contain nuts” if they cannot guarantee that the food they are producing is free of peanuts and/or nuts. Usually they cannot guarantee this, because peanuts and/or nuts are being used in the same machine as foods which were produced with no peanuts and/or nuts. This can result in contamination with peanut and/or nut residue or even small particles.

Note: The presence of foods labeled with “may contain” in a classroom would only be a concern when there is a potential that allergic children would actually eat these foods. For example, in the early grades where snacks are provided to the whole class.

Avoiding peanuts is not enough!

Avoiding peanuts and/or nuts is not enough for anyone who has a peanut and/or nut allergy. Even tiny amounts of peanut and/or nut residue on containers, utensils, jam jars, cutting boards and counter tops can be harmful and even fatal. **The table or desk where a peanut and/or nut lunch or snack has been eaten should always be washed with soap and hot water.**

My child enjoys peanut butter sandwiches. What do I make for lunch?

Here are some easy to make “Peanut and/or Nut-Safe” lunch and snack ideas! The key to a balanced lunch is to include three out of the four food groups listed in Canada’s Food Guide. Mix and match from the following lists to make lunch and snack choices.

Grain Products	Vegetables and Fruit	Milk and Alternatives	Meat and Alternatives	Combination Foods
bread/rolls/buns/pita bread	fresh fruit/ fruit juices/canned fruit	2% or 1% milk (white or chocolate)	meats/chicken/ fish	macaroni and cheese/ pasta with sauce
rice/noodles/ pasta	raw vegetables/ vegetable juice	yogurt/milk pudding	deli meats	pizza
crackers/ breadsticks	coleslaw/ potato salad/green salad	cheese/cream cheese/cottage cheese	tofu/beans/ lentils/baked beans*	chili*/soups
English muffins	cooked vegetables	cream soups (made with milk)	canned tuna/salmon	beef stew

*part of the legume family or may contain legumes

For more information contact:

Allergy Asthma Information Association @ 1-888-250-2298 or visit their website @ <http://www.aaia.ca/>

Adapted from materials produced by Nutritionists in the Halton Regional Health Dept. and Toronto Public Health, North York Office and private practice dietitian—Lynn Roblin. Produced and distributed by Nutrition Services, York Region Health Services Department, March 2007. May be reproduced, provided source is acknowledged. For more information call a Public Health Dietitian at Health Connection, at 1-800-361-5653, or visit www.york.ca and type “nutrition” in the search box.