

Soy Allergy

What is a soy allergy?

A soy allergy is an over reaction of your child's immune system to the protein found in soybeans. The reaction is similar to when the immune system responds to a virus or bacteria, but in this case the allergic reaction response is to attack harmless proteins found in soybeans. Soy is one of the 8 foods that are responsible for most allergies seen in children. The other foods include eggs, cow's milk, peanuts, tree nuts (such as walnuts and cashews), wheat, fish, and shellfish. A soy allergy is commonly noticed in infants at 3 months of age. Fortunately, most children outgrow this allergy by 2 or 3 years of age.

What are the symptoms?

The intensity of symptoms may range from mild to severe. Consult your allergist to confirm the diagnosis of a soy allergy.

- Skin reactions such as hives and eczema
- Diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, or itching around the mouth
- Running nose, wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Swelling and itching
- Asthma

Although rare, it is possible to have an anaphylactic reaction. This is a serious reaction that is sudden, severe, and can involve the whole body. This type of reaction requires immediate medical attention, due to the fact that the person may experience difficulty breathing. In most cases, parents or caregivers of children that have severe allergy reactions carry an EpiPen in the event of an emergency.

What kind of formula should I use?

You may use regular (non-soy) baby formula if your child is only allergic to soy. However, if your child has a slow-onset milk allergy and a soy allergy, you will need to use hypoallergenic formula. There are two types of hypoallergenic formulas:

- Extensive hydrolyzed formulas: The proteins in these formulas have been broken down so that they are more easily digested and less likely to cause an allergic reaction. Brands include Nutramigen, Pregestamil and Alimentum. Partially hydrolyzed formulas are not an appropriate substitute.
- Elemental formulas: The proteins in these formulas are in the simplest form (100% free amino-acids) and are recommended when hydrolyzed formula continues to cause symptoms. Brands include Neocate and Elecare.

What dietary changes do I need to make for my older child?

Avoiding soy and foods which contain soy is the only treatment for a soy allergy. You will need to change the way you prepare and shop for food. Soy is not a major source of nutrients in an American diet, but soy is found in everyday foods such as baked goods, cereals, sauces, soups and even canned tuna. Eliminating these groups of foods can lead to vitamin deficiency. A registered pediatric dietician should evaluate a child's diet to assure nutritional needs are met.

How will this affect my child's diet?

Eating a soy free diet is definitely a challenge. You will become proficient in reading food labels and learning to distinguish between soy products and ingredients that contain soy. The good news is soy allergy is one that most children outgrow.

Foods and ingredients that contain soy:

- Edamame (soybeans)
- Soya
- Soy Milk
- Soy protein
- Soy sauce
- Worcestershire sauce
- Soybean (granules, curd)
- Soy (flour, fiber, albumin, grits, nuts, fruits, sprouts)
- Soy protein as hydrolyzed, concentrate, isolate
- Tofu (soybean curd)
- Tamari
- Tempeh
- Miso

Foods that often contain soy (check label or ask):

- Most Asian foods (both packaged and served in restaurants)
- Flavoring (natural or artificial)
- Vegetable broth or gum
- Textured vegetable protein (TVP)
- Hydrolyzed plant protein
- Cereals
- Baked goods
- Some infant formula

How can I keep my child safe at school?

- Educate your child on the dangers of sharing foods.
- Prepare your child's lunch at home.
- Teachers and administrators at school should know about your child's needs. Teachers should explain to other students the situation.
- In the event of classroom special occasions have teacher inform you so that you may bring a few modified treats that your child enjoys and can share with other kids.
- Make a card for your child which has a list of foods and ingredients that should be avoided. Give a copy to teacher and also to child to carry with.