

Wheat allergy and sensitivity

Information and advice for parents and carers

Paediatric Nutrition & Dietetics

What is wheat allergy and sensitivity?

Wheat is a grain and a member of the cereal family of foods. Some examples of foods made from wheat include breads, pasta, biscuits, cakes and breakfast cereals. This booklet gives basic information about avoiding wheat in your diet. You should always seek the advice of a dietitian if you are planning to follow a wheat-free diet.

Note: A wheat-free diet is different to a gluten-free diet. This booklet is not intended for use by people with Coeliac Disease.

How is a wheat allergy or sensitivity diagnosed?

To confirm your child has a wheat allergy, their doctor/nurse may perform a skin prick test or blood tests (sIgE). For the skin prick test, a small amount of wheat extract in a solution will be applied on your child's arm and their skin will be pricked, they may feel a slight scratch.

It is important to know that the size of the reaction on a skin prick test or the sIgE level of a blood test shows how likely a reaction is to happen if your child is exposed to wheat, it does not predict the severity of the reaction.

What causes wheat allergy or sensitivity?

It is still uncertain why people develop food allergies. An allergic reaction to food is caused when the body's immune system treats harmless proteins found in food as a threat to the body by mistake. It then releases chemicals such as histamine to prevent this threat, which it thinks is an infection. These chemicals can cause a variety of symptoms of allergy.

Some people may only need to avoid products which have large amounts of wheat in them, for example, bread & rolls, chapatti, pasta, croissants, cakes, biscuits, breakfast cereals made from wheat, crackers and pancakes.

For others only small or trace amounts of wheat in a food may cause a reaction. In either case please ensure that your child is referred to a dietitian by their consultant and you have read the rest of this leaflet.

What are the symptoms of wheat allergy and wheat sensitivity?

Symptoms of mild wheat allergy

The following symptoms may look or feel serious but fall into the mild category:

- Urticaria (blotchy red rash, like nettle rash)
- Funny feeling/taste in the mouth
- Lip, eye or facial swelling
- Vomiting

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Symptoms of severe wheat allergy

A severe allergic reaction is known as anaphylaxis. This is a very rare reaction that only the most sensitive of people are at risk of. Anaphylaxis symptoms include:

- Difficulty in breathing or asthma attack
- Throat tightening
- Tongue swelling
- Drowsiness

Symptoms of wheat sensitivity

- Eczema flare up
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Bloating
- Tummy pain
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome

How is an allergic reaction treated?

If your child has eaten food which contains milk, you should do one of the following:

Mild reaction

Give them an antihistamine tablet such as chlorphenamine (Piriton) or loratidine (Clarityn).

Severe reaction

Children considered at high risk of anaphylaxis are prescribed an Epipen to carry with them at all times as part of an overall care plan. This is an adrenaline auto-injector (similar to an injection). If your child is given an Epipen, we will show you how to use it.

If your child has an anaphylactic reaction, you must treat it promptly with an Epipen and then dial 999. If you do not have an Epipen then dial 999 straight away. Tell them that your child is having an allergic reaction and the symptoms.

You will be given more detailed, written information about treating an allergic attack at your child's allergy clinic appointment.

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What foods normally contain wheat?

Wheat and wheat products are found in a variety of foods because wheat flour is often used to thicken or bulk out foods. The allergy information box on the packaging of food products should tell you if the food contains wheat. If you cannot see this box then **ingredients to look out for and avoid include:**

- Breadcrumbs
- Rusk
- Wholewheat
- Wheat germ
- Wheat starch
- Wheat thickener
- Hydrolysed wheat protein
- Wheat flour
- Wheat gluten
- Wheat bran
- Monosodium glutamate (MSG)
- Modified wheat starch
- Couscous
- Semolina
- Farola
- Spelt
- Triticale
- Kamut
- Wheat noodles
- Wheat/Durum pasta

Please note this is not a complete list.

Staying healthy on a wheat-free diet

Wheat and wheat products are important sources of energy, fibre and B vitamins. If you exclude wheat from your diet it is important to choose wheat-free foods which contain these nutrients. Please speak to your dietitian about these alternatives.

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Alternatives to wheat

There are many foods that are naturally wheat-free and most supermarkets stock wheat-free alternatives. Here are some examples:

Flour alternatives	Grain alternatives	Pasta & noodles	Breakfast cereals
Arrowroot Bean	Barley Corn	Wheat free pasta e.g.	Rice based
Buckwheat	Maize	rice, corn,	cereals
Chickpea	Millet	buckwheat	e.g. Rice pops
Corn	Pure oats	Rice noodles	Corn-cased cereals
Gram	Quinoa	Vermicelli	e.g. Corn flakes
Maize	Rice		
Potato	Rye		
Rice	Sago		
Rye	Tapioca		
Sago			
Soya			
Splitpea			

Cross contamination

Foods can become contaminated with wheat flour and wheat products during food preparation at home or in commercial production. It is important to thoroughly clean all work surfaces, utensils and storage areas. It is also advisable to use a separate toaster and foods such as margarine, butter, jam and other spreads.

Advice when:

Food shopping

Many supermarkets and health food stores have a 'Free from' section which can be useful for finding wheat-free products.

Always read food labels for wheat, even on foods eaten regularly. This is particularly important if the food item has had a change to the recipe. Your dietitian can help you with this if you are unsure how to read food labels.

Eating out

Always let the staff in restaurants and takeaways know that your child has a wheat allergy and if they cannot reassure you that the food is wheat free then choose an alternative dish or eat elsewhere.

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Informing your child's school and/or carers

Please ensure all carers are aware of your child's allergy and the treatment plan. Schools and day care nurseries will need to draw up a care plan for your child and staff will need to be trained in recognition and treatment of an allergic reaction. They will need to have antihistamines and/or an EpiPen kept at the school or nursery.

Allergy notification bracelet/chain

You may wish to consider purchasing a Medicalert bracelet or chain for your child which will carry information about his/her allergy. You can do this by contacting:

Medicalert

Freephone: 0800 581420

Email: info@medicalert.org.uk

Website: www.medicalert.org.uk

Medi-Tag

Tel: 0121 200 1616

Website: www.medi-tag.co.uk

Contact Details

Your doctor may or may offer a further clinic appointment depending on the assessment of your child. If your child has a more serious reaction or develops asthma you should arrange for them to be referred to the allergy clinic for a review of their treatment plan.

Dietitian: _____ Tel: _____

Useful information

The following websites provide useful information about allergies and wheat free products:

- www.wheat-free.org
- www.gluten-free-onthego.com
- www.allergyuk.org
Tel: 01322 619 898
- www.glutafin.co.uk
Tel: 0800 988 2470
- www.juvela.co.uk
Tel: 0151 288 1992
- www.livwellfoods.co.uk
- www.ds glutenfree.com
Tel: 0800 954 1981

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- www.dovesfarm.co.uk
- www.village-bakery.com
- www.meridianfoods.co.uk
- www.goodnessdirect.co.uk
Tel: 0871 871 6611
- www.wellfoods.co.uk
Tel: 0122 638 1712

Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- EBM Guidelines, 'Food allergy and hypersensitivity in children', 2010
- Host, A et al, 'Dietary prevention of allergic diseases in infants and small children.' Paediatric Allergy Immunology, February 2008
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 'Food allergy in children and young people' (CG116) , February 2011
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 'Anaphylaxis: assessment to confirm an anaphylactic episode and the decision to refer after emergency treatment for a suspected anaphylactic episode' (CG134), December 2011

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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