

ALLERGY TO SESAME

Introduction

There are early reports to suggest that sesame allergy is on the increase. This may be linked to its increased use in cooking: it is often used for flavouring and decorative purposes in foods. Cooking does not destroy its ability to cause allergic reactions.

Sesame seed allergy is often associated with additional food allergies such as peanut allergy. It is less commonly associated with other seed allergies; such as mustard, poppy and sunflower seed. Most reactions are mild, but occasionally severe reactions do occur. Even when previous reactions were mild or moderate, future reactions may be severe, and in some individuals provoked by only a tiny amount. Therefore all those affected should try to avoid sesame completely. All those with this allergy should have an emergency plan which may include an injectable adrenaline device. If prescribed this should be carried at all times.

What contains Sesame?

Common dishes containing sesame include: **tahini**, **gomashio**, **hummus** and **halvah**. Sometimes sesame is to be found in **Aqua Libra**.

People with sesame allergy have reported allergic reactions to vegetarian burgers, breadsticks, burger baps, cocktail biscuits, Middle Eastern foods, Chinese, Thai and Japanese foods, stir fry vegetables, salad dishes and health food snacks containing sesame.

Bread and other products bought from in-store bakeries can become contaminated by sesame seeds. This may not be obvious – they may be in the dough or on the bottom of the loaf.

New food ingredients labeling laws were voluntary from November 2004, and compulsory by law from 25th November 2005. They include all prepacked foods, drinks and alcoholic beverages for sale within the European Union. A full list of ingredients must be given for sesame however small the amount. Producers do not have to say that products may have been contaminated on the production line.

Some people react to **sesame oil** which can contain the sesame proteins that trigger allergic reactions. Chinese stir fry oils sometimes contain sesame oil, and this is probably why stir-fry meals cause reactions in some people. Sesame oil is also sometimes used in cosmetics and other personal care products. It may be labelled under the Latin name *sesamum indicum*. It may also sometimes be present in medications. Always ask your pharmacist to obtain full ingredients of any prescribed medicine.

How do I manage my allergy?

Allergy to sesame needs to be taken seriously, but, with proper management, the risks are small.

The management plan must involve:

- Expert medical advice
- Care at all times
- Asking for accurate information about ingredients
- Carrying prescribed rescue medication at all times

Further details can be obtained by contacting:

The Anaphylaxis Campaign
PO Box 275
Farnborough
Hampshire
GU14 6SX

Helpline: 01252 542029

Website: www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

The information contained in this leaflet has been provided by the British Society for Allergy & Clinical Immunology. Every effort has been made to ensure at the time of printing, its contents are accurate. However this leaflet should be used in conjunction with advice from a medical professional.