

Travelling Abroad with Food Allergy

Snacks when flying

Some people with food allergies (often peanut) report that they experience allergy symptoms while travelling in aircraft. The cause may be the free peanut snacks handed round to passengers with their drinks. If people eat these without washing hands afterwards, and then touch things like the tray table, seat belt etc., traces of peanut protein may be transferred onto these things. Symptoms are usually mild, but can include itchy rash, streaming eyes and wheezing.

Not every person with peanut allergy reports having a problem, but when it does occur, it can be extremely distressing. The vast majority of reactions are mild or moderate. If you find yourself in a situation where people are eating peanuts around you - irrespective of whether it's on a plane or not - be positive and remain calm. Look at our top tips for further risk reduction measures.

In response to concerns, some airlines no longer serve peanut snacks, and some will remove them from specified flights if contacted well in advance by the customer.

Many airlines now have a policy of not providing peanut snacks on their flights. However some still do, and no airline can prevent passengers bringing their own peanut snacks on board. The policy of each airline changes from time-to-time and it is essential to obtain verification from your travel agent AND airline about their particular policy several weeks in advance. For your own protection, ensure that the cabin staff are aware of your requirements.

Airline Meals

For people who suffer severe allergic reactions to food, airline meals may pose a particular risk. Many airlines will organise a special meal according to individual requirements, but mistakes can sometimes occur. Even when an airline has promised a meal free from a certain ingredient, it is important to ensure the information has been passed on. Enquire while checking in, and when boarding the plane.

For those who want to make certain of their personal well-being, the best advice is to take your own food. (Please contact the airline and confirm you can take your own food on board the flight.)

Medication

It is not advisable to take antihistamine as a precautionary measure before the flight.

If, for example a nut allergic patient were to take a bite from food contaminated with nuts, many of them (particularly children) will be able to detect that through immediate oral tingling/itching. This would make them stop eating any more of that food, possible even spitting it out before ingestion. If they have



antihistamines in their system, that early detection response might be reduced and they will continue eating more of the food potentially leading to a more severe reaction. Take antihistamine with you when travelling and use it in mild or moderate reactions, as and when required.

A letter is now required from your GP or specialist explaining the reasons why all necessary medication including the adrenaline auto-injector device has been prescribed, and why it needs to be carried in hand-luggage. You should arrange a suitable letter in plenty of time so that you can ensure that your medication is immediately available in case of an emergency.



Helpful Insurers

These two companies may provide cover for people with severe allergic reactions.

- ▶ All Clear - 0845 2505242
- ▶ Worldwide Travelplan – 0151 3342600 www.worldwidetravelplan.co.uk

Important advice

Take responsibility for your own safety. Ensure YOU communicate your needs to all relevant parties. (Travel agent and Airline Customer Services Department at time of booking flight; Airline check in desk and Flight cabin crew on departure day).

If you plan to negotiate the removal of nut snacks on your flight, take a non-confrontational stance. Use a softly softly approach. Try not to worry the airline so much they refuse to carry you or your party. Make it clear that you have a problem and need help.

Think ahead. Obtain verification that the above information is still accurate on the day of your flight; communicate well in advance with your travel agent and the airline you will be flying with. Try to obtain this verification in writing. Communicate directly with the airline's customer services / in-flight services. Ensure that your request is fully understood.

Ensure the airline you are dealing with is the one actually operating the flights. Some are franchised out to different airlines, which may not have the same policy or not be advised of the special arrangements.

In your letter outlining your needs (for example removal of peanut snacks on your flight) explain the potential problems which may occur. When many passengers open packets of peanuts the allergenic properties may be released into the air and potentially enter the eyes, nose or mouth, causing problems in mid-flight for some people with allergies.

Peanut allergy has doubled in the last ten years and this is the leading cause of anaphylaxis due to food. Avoid using the phrase "nut free flight". Airlines have no control over passengers who bring their own packet of nuts on board, even though they may make an announcement asking people to refrain from eating nuts.

You are advised to request from your specialist written medical evidence of the allergy and medication prescribed to treat a serious allergic reaction.

Take some high-energy snacks, which you know you are safe to eat, in case the flights are delayed.

If you are successful in securing special arrangements, ensure these are in place for all connecting flights. Take copies of the airline letters with you. When checking in, make sure the special arrangements made when booking your flight are still in place.

Do not forget your prescribed medication - Your adrenaline Auto Injectors (Epinephrine) antihistamines and inhalers if used. Make sure you have immediate access to your medication throughout the flight.

Top Tips:

Take some wet wipes to clean the immediate area around your seat. Such as tray table, seatbelt, arm rest etc.

Avoid using airline blanket or airline pillow

If purchasing food or eating in the airplane, look through or ask for a list of ingredient's which the food contains and practice Allergen avoidance.

Always wash hands before eating or putting fingers in the mouth.

Once you have written to the airline, don't forget to take the response letter with you, to show cabin crew & other staff.

Remember, if you or your child does not feel well or have signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction, let the cabin crew know immediately.

Make sure you are familiar with WHEN you need to use you or your child's adrenaline auto injector. Please see our Factsheet on Anaphylaxis for signs and symptoms to be aware of <http://www.allergyuk.org/severe-allergy-and-anaphylaxis/anaphylaxis>

HOW to use it. <http://www.allergyuk.org/severe-allergy-and-anaphylaxis/adrenaline-auto-injectors>

Although this factsheet refers mainly to airline travel, much of the advice is suitable for use when travelling by coach, train, bus, ferry etc.



Holiday tips

- ▶ Translation cards containing useful phrases in most European foreign languages are available from Allergy UK (see below).
- ▶ Before leaving home, check you have your prescribed medication. Carry this in your hand luggage NOT your suitcase. Check your expiry dates before you travel.
- ▶ If you have been prescribed adrenaline, make sure you take at least 2 kits with you on holiday.
- ▶ You are advised to obtain a letter from your General Practitioner explaining what the adrenaline auto-injector pen is used for, its contents and details regarding their condition.
- ▶ Do not forget your medical alert bracelet or talisman.
- ▶ On arrival at your holiday destination, inform the holiday rep of your allergies and find out where the resident doctor and nearest Accident and Emergency Department are located.
- ▶ Avoid leaving the adrenaline pens in direct sunlight. Light or excessive heat can cause the adrenaline to turn brown. DO NOT REFRIGERATE them! Keeping your kit in the shade should be enough to protect it. Avoid heat extremes, for example, the glove compartment or car boot. Always refer to the patient information leaflet accompanying your device.

Your Responsibilities

It is each person's responsibility or a member of their family or the carer of a food allergic person to check that all steps possible that can be taken are taken.

Your responsibility covers the following points:

- ▶ The request to remove peanut snacks on specified flights should be made at the time of booking your flight.
- ▶ Confirm details with Customer Service Department of the airline concerned prior to the day of departure.
- ▶ At the airline check-in desk on the day of departure.
- ▶ Finally with the airline cabin crew when you board the aircraft.

Know how to access the emergency services in the country you are visiting. Check the number of the emergency services with the travel agent or holiday representative before travelling.

Make sure your rescue medication is with your hand luggage. Some airlines may require a covering letter from a medical practitioner when carrying injections. Please, check with the booking agent.

Translation Cards

If you go abroad for your holidays, Allergy UK will provide translation cards which cater for all European languages and some other languages too. These translation cards can be worn on display or actually shown to hotel, or restaurant staff. It is vital for use in an emergency as a method of identifying the allergy. It could be a lifesaver. There is a charge of £15 for a set of 3 translation cards, for each language. If you wish to buy a set of translation cards please ring on 01322 619 898 (9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday.) Payment can be made by credit card.

It is strongly recommended that a bracelet, necklace or other warning emblem be visible to inform others of a potential problem or emergency treatment needed, e.g. ambulance, doctor, or hospital.

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