

FACT FILE

FOOD ALLERGENS

OVERVIEW

Some people are allergic to particular foods or ingredients in foods. If they eat or have contact with these foods, they have an allergic reaction that can cause mild to very severe and even life-threatening consequences. All food businesses should be aware of food allergens in order to protect their customers and avoid litigation.

ALLERGENS

Currently there are 10 recognised food allergens which cause 80% of allergies in people:

Wheat, Peanuts, Soy, Milk Eggs Tree Nuts, Crustacea, Fish, Sesame, Sulphites

Symptoms of food allergy usually occur within 30 minutes of eating the food and common symptoms can include low blood pressure, dizziness, faintness, swelling of lips and throat, nausea, feeling bloated, diarrhoea, swelling of tongue or mouth, shortness of breath, itchy skin, rash or hives.

Many people who believe they have a food allergy actually suffer from a food intolerance. A food intolerance is a chemical reaction to the food rather than an immune response. In some cases, food intolerance involves the inability of the body to digest a food. Symptoms of a food intolerance can be similar to symptoms of a food allergy however the symptoms of a food allergy can be very serious and may even be life threatening. The most common food intolerances are gluten and dairy (lactose).

FOOD LABELLING REQUIREMENT S

Food labels provide important information to customers to correctly identify food products which contain allergens. As a food business you are required by law to declare the most common ingredients (listed above in bold) known to cause allergic reactions when they are in the food you prepare and sell. Standard 1.2.3 of the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code make it a legal requirement to clearly declare allergen ingredients on packaged foods. It is recommended that allergen ingredients are listed in bold.

NUTRITION INFORMATION		
Servings per package: 3		
Serving Size: 150g		
	Quantity per Serving	Quantity per 100g
Energy	608kJ	405kJ
Protein	4.2g	2.8g
Fat, total	7.4g	4.9g
– Saturated	4.5g	3.0g
Carbohydrate, total	18.6g	12.4g
– Sugars	18.6g	12.4g
Sodium	90mg	60mg
*Percentage of recommended dietary intake		
Ingredients:	Whole milk, concentrated skim milk, sugar, banana (8%), strawberry (6%), grape (4%), peach (2%), pineapple (2%), gelatine, culture, thickener (1442).	
All quantities above are averages		

ALLERGEN REQUIREMENTS FOR UNPACKAGED FOODS

For food which is not packaged the law requires that accurate food allergen information is provided to the customer **upon request**. To enable this to be accurately provided it is recommended that the food business develop and maintain an allergen matrix for all menu items or food produced by the food business. An allergen matrix clearly lists common allergens in foods prepared at the food business in a simple table which makes it easy for staff to read and convey to the customer.

ALLERGEN MATRIX (Sample)

Item	Peanut	Tree nut	Dairy	Egg	Sesame Seed	Fish	Shellfish	Wheat	Soy
<i>Lasagne</i>			✓	✓				✓	
<i>Rissoles</i>				✓				✓	
<i>Pesto</i>		✓	✓	✓					

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR FOOD BUSINESSES

It is difficult for a food business to completely eliminate all food allergens from their food business. To reduce your risk and provide the most accurate ingredient information possible food business should consider the following advice:

- ✓ Avoid labelling menu item as gluten free or dairy free unless the food business can guarantee that the food does not contain traces of allergens.
- ✓ Minimise the risk of cross contamination by having separate utensils and equipment available to be used to prepare an allergen-free meal.
- ✓ When handling known allergens take care not to contaminate other surfaces and clean and sanitise all equipment which comes into contact with allergens.
- ✓ Keep a copy of the label of any foods which have been removed from their original packing.
- ✓ Train staff on the importance of providing accurate information about the ingredients in food.
- ✓ If food is contaminated with an allergen inform staff and customers.
- ✓ Stick to standard recipes which are documented so that the ingredients are easy to identify.
- ✓ When naming foods on display or in menus use names which include specific ingredients in the description e.g *fish and almond butter sauce*

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information, please contact the Shires Environmental Health Team: 5950 1050.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand - www.foodstandards.gov.au

Victorian Department of Health - www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety

Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia - www.allergyfacts.org.au