

Shellfish Allergy

Overview

Shellfish is among the most common food allergens. It is also one of the most dangerous, sending more food-allergic people to hospital emergency rooms than any other.



Shellfish allergy is different from fish allergy. Those who are allergic to shellfish do not necessarily have to avoid fish, and vice versa.

Allergy symptoms ranging from mild oral allergy to severe symptoms such as anaphylaxis.

Shellfish Allergy Triggers

There are two main subgroups within the shellfish family:

Crustacean group

Within the shellfish family, the crustacean group (shrimp, lobster, crab, crayfish) causes the greatest number of allergic reactions.

Allergies to crustacean seem to involve a muscle protein called tropomyosin, which is very similar in a wide range of crustacean foods.



Mollusc group

Many shellfish-allergic people can tolerate mollusc (scallops, oysters, clams and mussels). Whilst most individuals with allergy to shrimps (crustacean) can tolerate Mollusc, individuals with allergy to both types of shellfish have been reported.



In addition, some individuals with allergies to insects such as cockroach or moths can suffer food allergy to crustacean foods.

Avoidance

Cooking does not remove the allergen.

People who are allergic to shellfish don't necessarily have to eat it to develop a reaction. Avoid any possible direct or indirect exposure to the offending seafood species, including handling during food preparation, inhaling fumes during cooking.



Enquire about food preparation method and food ingredient when eating out, as some foods could have been in contact with the offending seafood species (e.g., French fries and fish may be prepared in the same oil). Stocks, soup or sauces, meat paste can be made with or contain crustaceans.



Check food labels for ingredient that you have to avoid.

Patients who have severe reactions should carry an injectable adrenaline (Epipen). Individuals with allergy to one kind of crustacean are usually advised to avoid all types of crustacean foods.

Examples of Crustaceans species

- Crab
- Mud crab
- Flower Crab
- Crab meat
- Lobster
- Crayfish
- Rock Lobster
- Langoustine
- Shrimp
- Prawns



Common Local food which may contain Crustaceans

- Laksa
- Mee Siam
- Prawn paste chicken
- Blachan
- Rojak sauce
- Popiah
- Shrimp based sambal Chinchalok
- Dim Sum
- Wonton
- Dumpling



Contributed by Nursing

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