

How to Read Food Labels for Allergies

From Victoria Grace, former About.com Guide Updated July 01, 2009

About.com Health's Disease and Condition content is reviewed by our [Medical Review Board](#)

Once you have been diagnosed with an allergy, the most important skill you can develop is reading food labels. Here's how to keep yourself safe while shopping for food. Consider this "Label Reading 101."

Difficulty: Average

Time Required: Ongoing

Here's How:

1. Find the complete label. This will usually, but not always, be located near the Nutrition Facts box. On an item that is marked "Not Labeled for Individual Sale," the complete list of ingredients may be on the larger container from which the item was taken. Remember: if you're not sure of every ingredient that went into a cooked item, **don't eat it!**
2. Read each ingredients on the label, paying special attention to boldfaced items, parentheses, and items listed below the complete list of ingredients.
3. For prepared foods (i.e., anything that is made from more than one ingredient), check the label for a warning that the food was made in a factory where your allergens may have been used on the same manufacturing lines.

Tips:

1. Always read labels, even if you've bought the same food before. Manufacturing formulations sometimes change.
2. Foods manufactured since January 1, 2006 are required to follow [FDA rules](#) that mandate that the top eight food allergens be listed in plain language either in the body of the ingredients or in boldface after the ingredients. However, be aware that some foods are older, or include hidden allergens.
3. Learn the lists of ingredients that might indicate [hidden allergens](#) (see below). Consider keeping a pocket-sized list on hand.
4. Many chain restaurants and fast food restaurants include allergy information on their websites. Save time by checking before you go.
5. Sign up for FDA or CFIA [allergy recall alerts](#) so that you'll know immediately if a food has been recalled for not having complete information on its label.

What You Need:

- label