

Child Care Center Food Allergy Fact Sheet

SESAME ALLERGY

What Is Sesame Allergy?

Sesame allergy is a potentially life-threatening immune system reaction to the proteins in sesame seeds. Affecting an estimated 1.6 million people in the United States, sesame was recognized as a major allergen by the *Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research (FASTER) Act of 2021*.



Avoiding Sesame

A child with a sesame allergy cannot consume sesame seeds or any foods that might contain sesame as an ingredient. The *FASTER Act of 2021* requires manufacturers to label sesame as an allergen on packaged foods by January 1, 2023. For any products dated before this date, sesame may appear undeclared in ingredients such as “natural flavoring” and spice blends. If you are unsure whether a product contains sesame, call the manufacturer and ask if sesame is used as an ingredient or is present in their manufacturing practices.

Sesame seeds often become “electrostatic,” causing them to cling to charged surfaces such as other foods, making it challenging to prevent *cross-contact*. Cross-contact is when one food allergen comes into contact with another food, transferring the allergens to the new food. A child with a sesame allergy should not consume a product labeled as being produced in a facility with sesame.

Sesame is also used in non-food items, such as cosmetics, perfumes, medications, nutritional supplements, and pet foods. The risk of these products for people with a sesame allergy is largely unknown, but they are best avoided.

If you have a child with a sesame allergy in your care, you need to be aware of foods and products that may contain sesame as an ingredient to prevent a reaction. The following tables list common names for sesame, sesame ingredients, and dishes, foods, and products that may contain sesame. It is important to read all food labels to check for sesame and products produced in a facility with sesame.

Common Names for Sesame

- Ajonjoli
- Benne, benne seed, beniseed
- Gingelly
- Sesamum indicum*
- Simsim
- Til or Teel

*The scientific name for sesame, *Sesamum indicum*, may be used on labels of non-food items, such as cosmetics, medications, nutritional supplements, and pet foods.

Sesame Ingredients

- Sesame flour
- Sesame meal
- Sesame oil*
- Sesame paste
- Sesame powder
- Sesame seed
- Sesamin
- Sesamol
- Sesamolin

*Sesame oil is usually “unrefined,” and consuming it can cause an allergic reaction.

Dishes, Foods, and Products That May Contain Sesame

- Baked goods (such as bagels, bread, breadsticks, hamburger buns, and rolls)
- Baba ganoush
- Candy, confection
- Chips (such as bagel chips, pita chips, and tortilla chips)
- Crackers (such as melba toast and sesame snap bars)
- Dressings, gravies, marinades, and sauces
- Falafel
- Goma dofu/gomadofu
- Gomasio (sesame salt)
- Granola
- Herbs and herbal drinks
- Halva/halvah/halwah
- Hummus
- Margarine
- Muesli
- Noodles
- Pasteli
- Pretzels
- Processed meats
- Protein and energy bars
- Rice
- Rice cakes
- Risotto
- Sesame salt
- Shish kabobs
- Soups
- Stews
- Stir fry
- Sushi
- Tahini
- Tempeh
- Turkish cake
- Veggie burgers

Reading Food Labels

Foods regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are required to follow the *Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 (FALCPA)*. In 2021, the *Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research Act (FASTER)* was passed into law. This act adds sesame as the ninth major allergen. This law took effect on January 1, 2023. *FALCPA* requires food manufacturers to list the nine major allergens and ingredients containing those allergens on the ingredient list of a food label in one of three ways:

- 1) Using their common or usual name **“Sesame”**
- 2) Providing the common or usual name of an allergen in parentheses after a lesser-known name of an allergenic ingredient **“Roasted Tahini (Sesame Seeds)”**
- 3) Using a “Contains” statement following or next to the ingredient list **“Contains Sesame”** or **“Contains Sesame Seeds”**

Food labels often contain an *advisory statement* following the ingredients list. This statement is NOT mandatory nor regulated in terms of the wording that should be used. Examples include:

“May contain sesame.”

“Manufactured on equipment that also processes sesame.”

Foods with an advisory statement should be avoided as the product may contain a trace amount of a particular allergen due to cross-contact. However, the absence of an advisory statement does not mean that the product has had no cross-contact with a particular allergen.

Food labels may also claim the product is free from a particular allergen. These claims are not regulated, and the product may be made in a facility where the allergen is present.



SESAME-FREE

Food Label Example

The following ingredient list is for a whole grain sesame seed bun. Notice how sesame is listed. Many, but not all, food manufacturers will include a “Contains” statement to be extra clear about the allergens present in their foods. However, this is not required if the allergens are listed with their usual, common names. Always read the ingredient list!

Ingredients: Water, **Whole Wheat Flour**, **Enriched Wheat Flour (Wheat Flour**, Niacin, Reduced Iron, Thiamine Mononitrate, Riboflavin, Enzyme, Folic Acid), Sugar. Contains 2% or less of Yeast (Yeast, Sorbitan Monostearate, Ascorbic Acid), **Sesame Seeds**, Soybean Oil, Salt, Monoglycerides with Ascorbic Acid and Citric Acid (Antioxidants), Fumaric Acid, Calcium Propionate (Preservative), Calcium Sulfate, Enzymes, Wheat Starch, Ascorbic Acid.

Contains: Wheat and Sesame.

All child care staff should be trained to read food labels and recognize food allergens. Ingredients and manufacturing processes change over time, so staff should carefully read labels for potential allergens every time a product is purchased. If there is uncertainty about whether a food product contains a certain allergen, contact the manufacturer for clarification.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends keeping labels of every product served to a child with food allergies for a minimum of 24 hours or as required by your State or local authority. If a product is kept as leftovers, be sure to keep the label for 24 hours after it is completely used or discarded.

Menu Modifications

A medical statement from a State licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian is required when meal modifications for a child with a food allergy are outside the meal pattern. A State licensed healthcare professional is defined as an individual authorized to write medical prescriptions under State law. Registered dietitians can write meal modifications for children with food-related disabilities even if they are not State licensed. All CACFP operations are required to implement the registered dietitian rule by October 1, 2025. Refer to the *Modifications to Accommodate Disabilities in the Child and Adult Care Food Program* and *Summer Food Service Program* memo on the USDA website (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/modifications-accommodate-disabilities-cacfp-and-sfsp>) for more information on using medical statements.

When planning a menu for a child with a sesame allergy, consider your current menu items to determine if you can create a reimbursable meal or snack free of sesame. Meals and snacks that meet meal pattern requirements do not require a medical statement. This approach minimizes the need to make meal modifications or prepare special recipes and reduces the burden on both providers and participants.

The following table lists safe alternatives to common menu items that contain sesame:

Menu Items & Condiments That May Contain Sesame*	Possible Substitutes* [†]
Bagels, bread, breadsticks, hamburger buns, and rolls	Bagels, bread, breadsticks, hamburger buns, and rolls without sesame
Crackers, pretzels	Crackers, pretzels without sesame
Dressings, gravies, marinades, and sauces	Dressings, gravies, marinades, and sauces that do not contain sesame
Granola, muesli	Granola or muesli without sesame
Main or side dish with baba ganoush, hummus, or tahini	Main or side dish without baba ganoush, hummus, or tahini
Pasta, rice, or stir-fried dishes	Pasta, rice, or stir-fried dishes without sesame
Processed meats	100% beef, pork, poultry, fish or shellfish; beans,
Soups or stews	Soups or stews without sesame

*All meals claimed for reimbursement must meet the CACFP meal pattern requirements. Please visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/meals-and-snacks> for more information. [†]Always review the food label to verify ingredients. Contact the manufacturer if there is uncertainty about whether a food product contains sesame.

Follow your center’s policies for handling food allergies. It is recommended to have a written care plan developed by the parents and the child’s health care provider if the child has a known food allergy. The written care plan should include the steps to follow if the child has a reaction. Consider posting lists of allergens around the center, particularly in food preparation areas. Staff who deal directly with food preparation, meal service, and/or children need to be informed of whom in the center has allergic concerns. This communication should be handled with discretion to protect the privacy of affected children.

Food Allergy Symptoms

An allergic reaction can be mild or severe. Symptoms of an allergic reaction can occur within minutes or a few hours of exposure to a food allergen. A child may experience different symptoms each time they have an allergic reaction. A history of mild reactions does not predict the severity of future reactions.

It may be difficult to determine when an infant or very young child is having an allergic reaction. They most likely do not understand what they are experiencing and may not have the language skills to tell you. Recognizing personality changes or when a child is looking unwell can offer important clues. Verbal children may say things like, “my mouth feels funny” or “my tongue is itchy.”

Common Symptoms of an Allergic Reaction

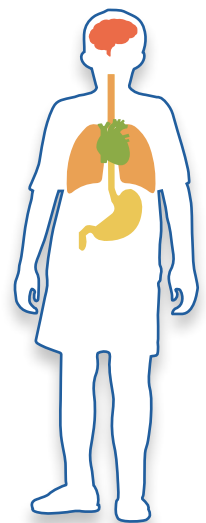
Body System	Symptoms
Skin	Hives, swelling (face, lips, tongue), itching, warmth, redness
Respiratory (breathing)	Coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest pain or tightness, throat tightness, trouble swallowing, hoarse voice, nasal congestion, or hay fever-like symptoms (sneezing; runny or itchy nose; red, itchy, or watery eyes)
Gastrointestinal (stomach)	Nausea, stomach pain or cramps, vomiting, diarrhea
Cardiovascular (heart)	Dizziness/light-headedness, pale/blue color, weak pulse, fainting, shock, loss of consciousness
Neurological (brain)	Anxiety, sense of “impending doom” (feeling that something really bad is about to happen), confusion, headache

A *mild reaction* is generally considered one bodily response to an allergen that does not impact breathing or blood pressure, such as localized hives, hay fever, or mild nausea.

A *severe reaction* is called **anaphylaxis**. It is potentially life-threatening and generally includes severe symptoms affecting two or more body systems. The most dangerous symptoms of anaphylaxis include **trouble breathing** (caused by swelling of the airways) and a **drop in blood pressure** (causing dizziness, light-headedness, feeling faint or weak, or passing out). A drop in blood pressure without other symptoms may also indicate anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis can occur without hives.

Follow your center’s emergency medical plans for responding to allergic reactions and your state’s specific rules and regulations for child care providers when administering medications. Anaphylaxis **MUST** be treated promptly with **an injection of epinephrine** followed by **calling 911**.

Once an allergic reaction begins, there is no way to predict if it will remain a mild, isolated response, or if it will become severe. Document and communicate with necessary staff and the child’s parents or guardians about their symptoms. Closely monitor the child for the next few hours in case the reaction intensifies. Be prepared to seek emergency care if needed.



Common Symptoms of an Allergic Reaction in Children Under 2 Years of Age

- Noticeable change in the sound of their cry
- Drooling
- Spitting up food or drink after feeding
- Uncontrolled passing of stool or urine
- Behavioral changes
 - Irritability
 - Unexpectedly becoming very sleepy or difficult to wake up
 - Suddenly appearing very frightened
 - Emotionally upset
 - Wanting to be held or comforted

References

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For More Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/foodallergies/index.htm>

Food Allergy Research & Education
<https://www.foodallergy.org>

Institute of Child Nutrition
<https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/food-safety>

US Food and Drug Administration
<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies>

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<https://www.fns.usda.gov/civil-rights/usda-nondiscrimination-statement-other-fns-programs>

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