

FOOD ALLERGY FACT SHEET

Sesame Allergies

What age groups are affected by sesame allergies?

Sesame is one of the nine major allergens in the United States. It is the most common seed to cause allergic reactions, affecting an estimated 1.6 million people. Most children with a sesame allergy will not outgrow it. Only 20–30% overcome the allergy, meaning there is a good chance it will last for life. Roughly 4 out of 5 people with a sesame allergy also have other food allergies such as peanut, tree nut, egg, and milk. Schools should be mindful that students with food allergies may be allergic to multiple foods.

What are the symptoms?

Knowing the signs of an allergic reaction can save a student's life. One or more symptoms may appear within minutes or a few hours after exposure. They can be mild or severe. Students can display different symptoms, even if they have the same allergy (e.g., one student with a sesame allergy may have trouble breathing when exposed to sesame, while another student with a sesame allergy gets nausea after consuming it). The symptoms a student experiences may differ with each reaction. A student who has had mild reactions in the past can still have a severe reaction in the future.

It is also important to recognize the symptoms of an allergic reaction as there is a possibility that a student may have a reaction yet not have a known food allergy. As shown in the following chart, the Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE) organization details how various symptoms can appear in the body.

Mild Symptoms	Severe Symptoms
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Gut</u>: mild nausea or discomfort (stomach pain, abdominal cramping)• <u>Mouth</u>: itchy; odd taste; slight, dry cough• <u>Nose</u>: itchy, runny nose; sneezing; congestion• <u>Skin</u>: a few hives (reddish, swollen, itchy areas on the skin), mild itch (sometimes in the ear canal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Body</u>: lightheadedness, fainting or loss of consciousness, anaphylaxis• <u>Gut</u>: repetitive vomiting or severe diarrhea• <u>Heart</u>: pale, turning blue, faint, weak or “thready” pulse, dizziness, chest pain, drop in blood pressure• <u>Lung</u>: shortness of breath, wheezing, repetitive cough, difficulty breathing• <u>Mouth</u>: significant swelling of the tongue or lips• <u>Psychological</u>: feeling something bad is about to happen, sense of impending doom, anxiety, confusion, feeling weak• <u>Skin</u>: many hives over the body, widespread redness, eczema• <u>Throat</u>: tight, hoarse, trouble breathing/swallowing, swelling



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What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction with a rapid onset that may cause difficulty breathing and death. It may disrupt breathing and blood circulation. An anaphylactic reaction usually occurs within minutes of exposure to an allergen. In rare cases, an anaphylactic reaction may happen hours after exposure. Symptoms of anaphylaxis include:

- Difficulty breathing, constriction of airways, tightness of the throat, hoarse voice
- Drop in blood pressure (e.g., pale, weak pulse, confusion, dizziness, fainting, weakness, loss of consciousness)
- Feeling of doom
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g., abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramping)
- Rapid pulse, cardiac arrest
- Shock
- Skin symptoms (e.g., hives, swelling)
- Swollen lips

What foods contain sesame?

Sesame is used in a variety of culinary ways, such as in oils, flavorings, spices, pastes, and seeds. The following charts list common names for sesame and some products that may contain sesame. It is important to be aware of the different types of sesame, sesame ingredients, and dishes that may contain sesame in daily life.

Common Names for Sesame		
• Anjonjoli	• Gingelly	• Sim sim
• Benne, benne seed, beniseed	• <i>Sesamum indicum</i> *	• Til or Teel

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

Sesame Ingredients		
• Sesame flour	• Sesame paste	• Sesamin
• Sesame meal	• Sesame powder	• Sesamol
• Sesame oil*	• Sesame seed	• Sesamolin

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

Dishes, Foods, and Products That May Contain Sesame

- Baked goods (bagels, breads, breadsticks, hamburger buns, rolls)
- Baba ghanoush/ganoush
- Candy, confection
- Chips (bagel chips, pita chips, tortilla chips)
- Crackers (melba toast, sesame snap bars)
- Dressings, gravies, marinades, sauces
- Everything bagel seasoning
- Falafel
- Goma dofu/gomadofu
- Gomasio (sesame salt)
- Granola
- Herbs and herbal drinks
- Halva/halvah/halwah
- Hummus
- Margarine
- Muesli
- Natural flavorings
- Noodles
- Pasteli
- Pretzels
- Processed meats/sausages
- Protein and energy bars
- Rice
- Rice cakes
- Risotto
- Sesame salt
- Shish kabobs
- Snack mix
- Soups
- Spices/spice blends
- Stews
- Stir-fry
- Sushi
- Tahini, tahinia, tahin, tahina, and tahine
- Tempeh
- Turkish cake
- Veggie burgers



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Where is sesame listed on food labels?

Food labels regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) follow the *Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act* (FALCPA) regulations. FALCPA regulates how the major food allergens (egg, fish, milk, peanuts, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, and wheat) are listed on the label. These allergens must be listed in one of three ways: (1) using the common name, (2) common name written in parenthesis after the ingredient, or (3) in a “contains” statement. In 2021, Congress passed the *Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research Act* (FASTER). This act added sesame as a major allergen that had to be written on a food label according to FALCPA requirements. This law took effect on January 1, 2023. If you are unsure whether a food contains sesame, contact the manufacturer directly.

School nutrition staff should always carefully read labels, even for foods that generally do not contain sesame. The following ingredient list is for a whole grain sesame seed bun. Notice how sesame is listed. Many food manufacturers will include a “Contains” statement to clearly define the allergens present in their foods. However, this is not required if the allergens are listed with their usual common names (bold is used for illustrative purposes only).

Label 1	Label 2
<p>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, Sesame bean oil, Salt, Monoglycerides with ascorbic acid and citric acid (antioxidants), Fumaric acid, Calcium propionate (Preservative), Calcium sulfate, Enzymes, Wheat starch, Ascorbic acid.</p> <p>Contains: Wheat, Sesame</p>	<p>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, Sesame bean oil, Salt, Monoglycerides with ascorbic acid and citric acid (antioxidants), Fumaric acid, Calcium propionate (Preservative), Calcium sulfate, Enzymes, Wheat starch, Ascorbic acid.</p>

Check labels for advisory statements like “may contain sesame,” “produced on shared equipment with sesame,” or “produced in a plant that uses sesame.” Sesame seeds often become “electrostatic,” which causes them to cling to charged surfaces such as other foods, making it difficult to prevent cross-contact. Cross-contact is when a food with allergens comes into contact with an allergen-free food transferring the allergens to the new food. Avoid foods with advisory statements because the product may contain a small amount of sesame due to cross-contact.

For example, whole grain bread may or may not contain sesame depending on the recipe but may be baked on a production line with bread that does. The whole grain bread could be labeled like below (bold is used for illustrative purposes only):

<p>INGREDIENTS: Whole wheat flour, Water, Enriched wheat flour, Honey, Yeast, Salt, Sunflower seeds, Flaxseed, Oats, Wheat bran.</p> <p>Contains: Wheat</p> <p>Produced on equipment that also handles sesame.</p>
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School nutrition staff must learn to read product labels and identify food allergens. Because food labels change occasionally, school nutrition staff should check for sesame and sesame ingredients on every product label each time they are received. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that labels be maintained for a minimum of 24 hours for every product served to a student with food allergies in case of a reaction. If the product is saved for later use as leftovers, keep labels for 24 hours after all the product has been used up or discarded.

What substitutes can be used for sesame in student meals?

When meal modifications for a student with food allergies are outside of the meal pattern, a medical statement from a State licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian is required. A State licensed healthcare professional is defined as an individual authorized to write medical prescriptions under State law. Registered dietitians are allowed to submit medical statements for meal modifications for students with food allergies, even if they do not have a State license. Refer to the manual *Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs: Guidance for School Food Service Professionals* on the USDA website for information on the required content of the medical statement.

If there is uncertainty about the statement, or if it does not provide enough information, contact the household or State licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian (as permitted by the family) for clarification. However, clarification of the medical statement should not delay the school nutrition department from providing a meal modification. School nutrition staff should follow the portion of the medical statement that is clear and unambiguous to the greatest extent possible while obtaining additional information or an amended statement.

When planning menus for students with sesame allergies, consider current food choices to determine if a reimbursable meal can be selected from foods offered that do not contain sesame. This approach will minimize the need to prepare special recipes or to make meal modifications.

The following chart lists common menu items that may be used as safe alternatives for items that contain sesame.

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

*Always check the ingredient label to verify ingredients and check for potential cross-contact.



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Common Questions

What are some non-food items that may contain sesame?

Sesame can be found in items such as pet foods, medications, nutritional supplements, perfumes, and cosmetics (hair products, soaps, lotions, skin creams, and lip glosses). It is important to always read the ingredient statement for sesame and call the manufacturer if there is uncertainty.

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For More Information

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

Institute of Child Nutrition
<http://www.theicn.org/foodsafety>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Food Allergens
www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition/food-allergies

This project was funded using U.S. Department of Agriculture grant funds. The USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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Suggested Reference Citation:

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2025). *School food allergy fact sheets – Sesame allergies*. University, MS: Author.

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05/08/2025



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