

Diet and shellfish allergy

A shellfish allergy occurs when someone's immune system reacts to the protein in shellfish because it thinks it's harmful to the body, which causes a range of different symptoms.

Approximately 1% of the population suffer from a shellfish allergy and it usually remains a lifelong problem. A shellfish allergy can develop later in life, even if someone has been eating shellfish without problems for years.

Symptoms of an allergic reaction

Hives/skin reactions, swelling and gastrointestinal reactions are some of the most common allergic reactions to shellfish and are considered mild.

However some people can experience severe, life threatening reactions to shellfish. This includes anaphylaxis, which involves breathing difficulties and swelling of the throat and tongue.

General allergy management

For basic tips to manage your food allergy, check out the NEMO resource '*Food allergies – general information and management guide*'. An important part of managing food allergies is reading all food labels carefully even if it has been used safely in the past, as ingredients

may change without warning. It is also important that you are able to manage cross contamination to be able to choose safe foods. Ask your dietitian for further guidance or refer to the NEMO resources '*Label reading for food allergies*' and '*Allergies and avoiding cross contamination*' for more information on these topics. If you do not feel confident about how to manage your allergy, talk to your doctor, allergy specialist or dietitian to get further help.

Shellfish allergy management

If you are allergic to shellfish, it does not necessarily mean that you are allergic to fish. This is because the protein in fish is slightly different to the protein in shellfish and your body may not react to it the same way. Again because of the small differences in the proteins, people that are allergic to crustaceans (e.g. lobster, crab, crayfish, crawfish, prawns, shrimp and yabbies) can sometimes tolerate molluscs (e.g. octopus, squid, clams, calamari, oysters, mussels). However this cannot be confirmed without a specific allergen test. Do not try different types of shellfish without consulting your allergy specialist.

If you are allergic to shellfish, any foods containing shellfish should be avoided. The table on page three features foods which are naturally shellfish-free, foods which may contain shellfish (molluscs and crustaceans) and foods which should be avoided.

It is possible for an allergic reaction to occur from inhaled cooking vapours or handling shellfish. Depending on the severity of your allergy, it may be necessary to avoid areas where shellfish is cooked – your doctor or allergy specialist can advise what is best for you. It is also important to remember the risk of finger-to-mouth contamination. This is when someone puts their hands in their mouth after touching an allergic food and accidentally swallows it. This is common in children, so it is very important to teach kids to avoid touching allergens and wash their hands well with warm water and soap.

Other products to be aware of:

- Lotions, shampoos, moisturisers and similar cosmetic products can contain food allergens. Depending on what your allergy specialist has advised you may need to avoid these products.
- Some medications (prescribed and over-the-counter) and alternative therapies can also contain food allergens. These should be avoided.

Remind your doctor and pharmacist about your allergy every time you get a new medication.

- Glucosamine is a popular complimentary medication used to relieve joint pain in osteoarthritis. Made from the shell of some shellfish, it is often said that people who are allergic to shellfish should avoid this. Although the shellfish protein that causes allergic reactions isn't present in the shell, there may still be traces of shellfish in the medication. Companies don't regularly test glucosamine to check for traces of shellfish. Vegetarian glucosamine is available which is not made from shellfish products.
- Be cautious when purchasing foods that have been cooked in oil (e.g. chips, fish) as the oil may have also been used to cook shellfish. These traces of shellfish can still cause an allergic reaction, therefore use caution before eating at seafood restaurants.
- Individuals with a seafood allergy do not have a higher risk of also having an iodine allergy. This is an old myth that has been proven false by many studies. Examples of iodine products include x-ray contrast and topical iodine-containing antiseptics (e.g. Betadine).

Food group	Naturally shellfish-free	May contain shellfish READ LABEL – any shellfish present will be declared	Contains shellfish – avoid
Breads and grains	Oats Psyllium husk Rice Wheat Barley Plain/self-raising flour Rice paper sheets	Bread Breakfast cereals and mueslis Foods from bakeries Baked goods (biscuits, cakes, scones etc.) Pasta and couscous Crackers, corn/rice thins	
Meat/meat alternatives	Barbeque chicken Eggs Plain, packaged/ tinned fish Fresh plain meat Plain tofu Vegetarian patties and sausages Dried/canned legumes	Deli fish and meats (due to risk of cross-contamination) Marinated meats, fish and tofu Sausages (check sauces and flavourings used) Seafood extender Surimi Falafel	All shellfish including: abalone, Balmain bugs, barnacles, clams, cockle, crawfish, crayfish, cuttlefish, lobster, marron, molluscs, Moreton Bay bugs, mussels, octopus, oysters, prawns, scallops, scampi, shrimp (crevette), sea slugs, sea snails, snails, squid (calamari), yabbies Imitation seafood (e.g. seafood sticks)
Dairy	Cow's or goat's milk Soy or almond milk Rice or oat milk Plain cheese Plain yoghurt Milk powder Ice-cream	Marinated cheeses	
Vegetables	Always thoroughly wash vegetables before using. All fresh vegetables Canned/frozen vegetables	Take-away potato chips (check for beer battered and contaminated oil) Premade vegetable/ potato salad	
Fruit	Always thoroughly wash fruit before using. All fresh fruit Canned, frozen and dried fruit Fruit juice		
Sauces, Fats and Oils	Nut or plant-based oil (e.g. olive oil, peanut oil, sunflower oil, rice bran oil) Butter	Fish sauce Marinara sauce Oyster sauce Pescatore sauce Flavoured oil Worcestershire sauce (contains anchovies)	Shellfish oil

Miscellaneous	Soft drinks Honey Yeast extract spreads (e.g. Vegemite, Marmite) Gum Tea and coffee	Bouillabaisse Cuttlefish ink Fish stock Natural and artificial flavourings Seafood flavouring (e.g. clam) Squid ink	
Cuisines		Asian soups and dishes Commercially made pizza	

Note: This is not a complete list of all foods to avoid but is intended as a helpful aid. It is NOT designed to replace medical advice given by your doctor, allergy specialist or dietitian.

For further information, go to:

1. **ASCIA** (The Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy): the peak professional body of allergy and clinical immunology specialists in Australia. They have lots of resources available on their website to help with living with an allergy - www.allergy.org.au/
2. **Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia:** an Australian organisation that aims to improve awareness of allergies through education and research. They assist with managing allergies for individuals, families, schools, workplaces, the government and food industries. Check out their website (www.allergyfacts.org.au) for further information and to become a member.

3. **FSANZ** (Food Standards Australia and New Zealand): a government agency responsible for developing codes and standards for foods - www.foodstandards.gov.au

Disclaimer:

This resource provides information on the management of a diagnosed food allergy – it is not meant to replace advice from your doctor, allergy specialist or dietitian. The food and ingredient lists included in this resource are not exhaustive and may change. Individuals with food allergy should always check food labels each time a product is purchased.