

Living with allergy – soya / soy

Soya, which is the same as soy, is a protein made from soya beans.

Allergy to soya is relatively uncommon compared with others such as egg or milk. Fortunately children should have a good chance of growing out of an allergy to soya.

It is very common in diets and can be eaten in a number of forms: as *whole beans*, as *flour* (which may be processed into *textured vegetable protein*) or as an oil. It may also be an ingredient in processed foods as an emulsifier and stabiliser.

Symptoms

Symptoms of soya allergy in children are usually mild and take the form of a rash. Much more rarely, severe symptoms might include breathing difficulties and anaphylaxis.

Avoiding soya

Because soya is used so commonly, vigilance is needed when watching out for it in foods. It is, however, a legal requirement for soya to be declared on the ingredients.

Sometimes, when breastfeeding is not possible, soya milk is recommended as an alternative to cow's milk formula. However, it is not recommended for infants of six months or less, or that it is used without first getting advice from a dietitian.

A suitable alternative is extensively hydrolysed casein formula. These formulae are less likely to cause allergy and are tolerated by infants who are allergic to cow's milk.

A link with cow's milk?

There are no common proteins in cow's milk and soya so it doesn't always follow that people who are allergic to one will be

allergic to the other. However, soya is potentially as allergic as cow's milk so soya would not normally be fed to a child who is susceptible to allergy or in a child younger than six months. As mentioned above, an extensively hydrolysed casein formula is a suitable alternative.

Other, connected allergies

The soya bean belongs to a family of plants known as legumes. This is the same plant family as peas and lentils so children who are allergic to soya are often allergic to *peas* and *lentils* as well as *peanuts*.

When a patient is diagnosed with an allergy to soya, it may be worthwhile for other family members to be tested for this allergy.

Going shopping

Soya flour is widely used in bakeries and it is an ingredient in many breads, cakes and biscuits. As fresh bread does not carry a list of ingredients it may be advisable to go for packaged bread and to check the label.

Some infant foods contain soya flour. *Hydrolysed vegetable protein* and textured vegetable protein can both be derived from soya.

Lecithin is an ingredient normally made from unrefined soya oil. Although the risk of a severe reaction to soya lecithin is small, it is best avoided.

Refined soya oil should be safe for the vast majority of people with soya allergy. It can be found in many foods including salad dressings and margarine. Unrefined soya oil carries a higher risk but is rarely used.

Soya sauce also known as soy sauce is commonly used in Far Eastern recipes as well as a flavouring in soups, gravies and sauces – **PLS advise, is it a problem?**

Tofu is another name for soya bean curd is often used as a protein source for vegetarians or people cutting down on meat. It is used in stir fries and soups in the Far East.

Medicines for example, asthma inhalers contain lecithin and it's always worth asking the pharmacist if a medicine contains soya.

Further information on allergy is available from www.allergyai.com

These lists are guides – always check the individual labels.

If it's not labeled, it is safer to avoid the food.