



Welcoming Girls with Food Allergies into Your Troop

A food allergy is an unusual response to a food caused by the body's immune system. Allergic reactions to food can sometimes cause serious illness and even death. Tree nuts and peanuts are the leading causes of dangerous allergic reactions called anaphylaxis— this is an acute allergic reaction to an antigen to which the body has become hypersensitive. There are many foods which may cause an allergic reaction, however the type and extent of reaction can vary widely. For example, one person with a strawberry allergy may get a rash that will go away without medical attention; but another person allergic to strawberries may break out in itchy hives all over their body and require medical attention to resolve this reaction. Every person has unique allergic triggers and reactions. This includes environmental allergies as well as food allergies.

When someone with a food allergy eats a product to which they're allergic (ex. berries or nuts), their immune system launches an attack by releasing histamine and other powerful substances which causes an "allergic reaction".

Symptoms of an allergic reaction can be rashes, hives, cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, lightheadedness, increased heart rate, difficulty breathing or asthmatic inflammation, excess mucus production, sneezing, coughing, congestion in the nasal or airway passages, swelling of the lips, tongue, or throat, and watery eyes.

People with food allergies may manage their allergies in different ways. There is medication they may take orally or via injection. They may simply avoid foods that cause allergic reactions. Or if they have an anaphylaxis allergic reaction to something they may carry an EpiPen/Epinephrine Auto-Injector with them. If their food allergies cause asthmatic reactions they may also have asthma medication, a rescue inhaler, or regulatory inhaler as well.

Some suggestions and strategies for preparing for and including girls with Food Allergies in your troop:

1. Consult with the girl's parent/guardian beforehand about any medication or medical equipment that may be present with the girl or adult during meetings-- be clear in how and when to administer the medication or treatment and be sure it's being stored in a safe location away from general accessibility of the girls (they may have an "Asthma Action Plan" or "Allergy Action Plan" to consult)
2. If a girl has a rescue inhaler or EpiPen, make sure that it is safely kept away from the other girls, but also is easily accessible by the girl or a trained adult in the event of an asthma attack or anaphylaxis allergic reaction. According to Pennsylvania law, only the allergic person, or a person with specific training in auto-injector use is allowed to administer an auto-injector. The PA Health Dept provides a list of approved trainings that would allow use of an auto-injector. Please visit the PA Health Dept. site for the most current information:
<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/school/Pages/Epinephrine-Training.aspx>
3. Ask the parent/guardian to provide you with ideas and instructions about what foods to serve and how to prepare them-- some allergies are more sensitive than others and may require extremely cautious food handling or even separate meal/snack times
4. If there is a severe, anaphylaxis allergy present, ask the parent/guardian if it is okay to share with all the other parents and girls in the troop so that they may avoid bringing the allergen into contact with the girl (ex. peanuts)
5. Remind the other girls in the troop not to share food with their food allergic friend. In fact, you might want a general policy of not sharing any personal food, unless it is a troop-approved snack or meal.
6. Everyone should wash their hands before and after eating to help prevent traces of an allergen from being passed on
7. If there is any symptom of an allergic reaction, address the situation: 1) Consult the parent/guardian for help and directions 2) Administer appropriate medication if trained and permission has been given 3) Remove the allergen from the situation 4) Call for EMS if necessary
8. Unless the girl and her parent/guardian prefer confidentiality within the troop, have the girl share about her differing abilities and special needs with the troop and allow the other girls to ask questions in a sensitive and caring manner.

This will promote better understanding and allow everyone to work together as a troop to ensure that everyone's needs are met

9. Always consult with the parent/guardian beforehand to be sure you're providing for the girl's needs to the best of your ability-- they will know the best methods and strategies to help their child

Some food preparation suggestions for some more common allergies:

- **For milk-free (lactose-free) baking:** substitute with- water, fruit juices, rice milk, or soy milk
- **For egg-free baking:** substitute with-
 - 1 tsp. baking powder, 1 T. liquid, 1 T. vinegar
 - 1 tsp. yeast dissolved in 1/4 cup warm water
 - 1 T. apricot puree
 - 1 1/2 T. water, 1 1/2 T. oil, 1 tsp. baking powder
 - 1 packet gelatin, 2 T. warm water (do not mix until ready to use)
- **For wheat-free baking/thickening:** substitute 1 T. wheat flour with-
 - 1 1/2 tsp. cornstarch
 - 1 T. white or brown rice flour
 - 1 1/2 tsp. potato starch
 - 2 tsp. quick-cooking tapioca
 - 1 1/2 tsp. arrowroot starch
 - 1 1/2 tsp. sweet rice flour
- Use Sunflower Seed Butter in place of Peanut Butter or Almond Butter
- Use Soy, Almond, Coconut, or Lactose-Free Dairy Supplements
- Gluten-Free Substitutions are commonly available in most stores and restaurants now, and often simply removing any gluten-bearing items will suffice

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For more help and information please visit Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
<http://www.aaafa.org/page/allergic-asthma.aspx> and Food Allergy Research and Education
<http://www.foodallergy.org>

If you have other questions or concerns you may contact GSEP via email at memberservices@gsep.org or via phone at 215-564-2030

This document is not intended to replace or supersede any doctor's instructions nor should it in any way be taken as medical advice or directions. This resource is a suggestion for GSEP volunteers to use while welcoming girls with special needs to their troops and is for informational and educational purposes only. Please follow a parent/guardian's instructions in the medical care of their child and make sure you always have the appropriate medical and troop permission forms completed and available for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel.