



The **Anaphylaxis** campaign
Helping people with severe allergies live their lives

Celery and mustard: the need for information

Celery and mustard are both included in the EU list of allergens that are subject to mandatory labelling, but what is their significance for us here in the UK? In order to increase our knowledge, we are planning to send a questionnaire to our members who are allergic to those two foods in order to gain a clearer picture about the problems these people face. The results will be shared with corporate members.

Although common in parts of Europe, both allergies are rare in the UK and this is reflected in our membership. We have 20 members who state they are allergic to mustard and 13 in respect of celery. This is a small proportion of our 7,000 membership but our questionnaire study may still produce useful information. The project is likely to be completed after the end of the summer.

Research from around Europe demonstrates that both allergens are capable of causing severe reactions and threshold doses have not been established.

Mustard allergy is well documented in European studies with some showing it is a problem for children as well as adults. The European Food Safety Authority reported in 2004 that allergy to mustard is among the more common food allergies in France, accounting for about 1-7% of food allergy. Several papers suggest its prevalence in France is increasing.

Allergic reactions described in several case reports appeared to be triggered by small amounts of mustard, like contaminated cooking utensils. Furthermore, the major allergens of mustard are heat-resistant and are not greatly affected by food processing.

The Food Standards Agency reports on its website that people who are allergic to mustard will react to any food that comes from the mustard plant, including jars of mustard, mustard powder, mustard leaves, seeds and flowers, sprouted mustard seeds, mustard oil, and foods that contain these.

The documentation on the prevalence of mustard allergy is scarce. Some sources suggest the presence of irritating substances in mustard may cause symptoms that aren't actually allergy, leading to a false perception of prevalence.

Celery allergy has figured in numerous scientific reports, most of them written by European experts. These have demonstrated that celery allergy is one of the most common pollen-related food allergies among adults in certain countries such as Switzerland, France and Germany. Allergy to celeriac (the celery root) is more common than to celery stick, although both can cause severe reactions. Symptoms vary from mild ones, such as oral allergy syndrome, to anaphylactic shock.

Geographical differences are interesting. In Central Europe, a high proportion of people with birch pollen allergy are prone to celery allergy. In Southern Europe celery allergy is most frequently related to mugwort pollen, and in those cases it is potentially more severe.

Thermal processing does not completely deplete the allergenicity of celery, according to reports. For some people allergic reactions to cooked celery will take place even after high temperatures are used. These may be particular proteins which are responsible for serious systemic reactions rather than simply oral ones.

Other food allergens also have increasing significance across Europe. EuroPrevall, an international task force, looking at food allergies on the Continent and beyond, has found that overall in Europe, hazelnut and apple are the most common triggers of food allergy. In Mediterranean areas, peach and melon allergies are common. Iceland has a high incidence of fish allergy.