



## The **Anaphylaxis** campaign

Helping people with severe allergies live their lives

### **Oral allergy syndrome: an increasingly common problem**

*We published the following bulletin in July 2003 and are repeating it to coincide with the current media interest in oral allergy syndrome.*

“Oral allergy syndrome” is an aspect of allergy that is not widely known about in the food industry and because we receive occasional queries about this fairly common medical problem, we have written the following summary.

Oral allergy syndrome (also known as pollen-fruit syndrome) is caused by sensitivity to certain fresh fruits and vegetables. In the most common form, there will be a localised swelling or itching in the lips, mouth tongue or throat immediately after contact with the food. Fresh fruit or raw vegetables normally cause these symptoms. Reactions to the same foods when cooked are less likely.

Adults appear to develop oral allergy syndrome more often than children (although since this bulletin was written, some allergy specialists have reported a rise in the number of children with the condition).

Most people affected have mild symptoms and can generally be reassured that their condition is never likely to become severe, although it is unlikely that they will ever grow out of it. In occasional cases, the doctor may consider that there is a risk of a severe allergic reaction and the patient may be advised to carry adrenaline by injection as a precaution.

Symptoms of oral allergy syndrome include:

- Redness, swelling and itching of lips, tongue and inside of mouth.
- Occasionally itchy swelling of the throat may occur.
- Symptoms in the gullet or stomach include pain and discomfort, heartburn, nausea and even vomiting.
- Less commonly, general symptoms such as nettle rash, rhinitis and asthma may occur minutes or an hour or two later, particularly if the person affected ignores the local symptoms and eats all of the culprit food.

Numerous fruits and vegetables are implicated including apple, pear, carrot, celery, melon and cherry.

Allergy symptoms in the mouth or throat can also be caused by other foods, such as peanuts, egg and shellfish. These may be part of a wider range of symptoms, which can be life-threatening, and should not be confused with the condition under discussion here.

Skin test and blood tests are not particularly good at confirming a diagnosis of oral allergy syndrome using commercially prepared materials. The only useful test at present is "prick to prick" skin tests using fresh fruits.

A person with oral allergy syndrome may also have an associated allergy to certain pollens (particularly birch pollen), and may get hay fever when these pollens are in season.

If you would like further information about oral allergy syndrome – including details of which pollens are associated with which food allergies – we would be happy to supply them.

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