

Allergy to sesame: a growing problem?

Sesame allergy is fairly common in some countries, including Australia and Israel, and it would appear to be on the increase in the UK. Occasionally reactions are severe. Even when these are mild or moderate, it must be assumed that a future reaction may be severe and medical advice should be sought in all cases. Where it is considered there is a real risk of an extreme reaction, injectable adrenaline may be prescribed. This should be carried at all times.

The rise in sesame allergy is probably linked to its increased use in cooking: it is often used for flavouring and decorative purposes in foods. People who are allergic to sesame must seek to avoid it completely, as even a tiny amount may trigger a severe reaction.

Heating does **not** destroy the allergenicity of sesame.

Dishes containing sesame include: **tahini**, **gomashio**, **hummus** and **halvah**. **Chinese stir fry oils** sometimes contain sesame oil. Sometimes it is to be found in **Aqua Libra**.

People have also reported allergic reactions to veggieburgers, breadsticks, burger baps, cocktail biscuits, Middle Eastern foods, Chinese, Thai and Japanese foods, stir fry vegetables, salad dishes and health food snacks containing sesame.

Sesame oil should be regarded as extremely risky because it is almost certain that it will be **unrefined**, and therefore contain the allergenic proteins that trigger allergic reactions.

Bread and other products bought from in-store bakeries must also be viewed as suspect because these may be contaminated by sesame seeds from

other bread. The seeds may not be obvious – they may be in the dough or on the bottom.

Sesame is sometimes used in cosmetics and other personal care products and in such cases may be labelled under the Latin name *sesamum indicum*. Sesame oil may occasionally be present in pharmaceuticals. Always ask your pharmacist to obtain full ingredients of any prescribed medicine.

Allergy to sesame needs to be treated as seriously as peanut allergy. Nevertheless, people affected can be assured that with proper management, the risks will be minimal. Central to any management strategy are proper medical advice, care and vigilance at all times, a commitment to ask for accurate ingredient information and an understanding that prescribed medication must be carried at all times.

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