

## Allergy to buckwheat

This article is written for people who want to find out more about buckwheat allergy.

Buckwheat is a major food allergen in Japan and Korea, and there are also reports of it triggering severe allergic reactions elsewhere, including in Europe.

Buckwheat allergy is thought to be rare in the UK, but as the use of buckwheat increases, we could see more cases.

Buckwheat can be made into flour but is not in the same family as wheat. Despite its name, buckwheat is not a true cereal as it is not a member of the grass family. It is related to sorrels, docks, bindweed and rhubarb. As wheat and buckwheat are not related, there would be no reason to suspect buckwheat would cause an allergic reaction for those with wheat allergy.

Buckwheat allergy could easily be missed by doctors when they investigate patients' food allergies because it is so unusual. It is possible that some people diagnosed with idiopathic allergy (allergy of unknown cause) are actually suffering from buckwheat allergy.

### Avoiding buckwheat

Avoiding buckwheat is vital for anyone allergic to it. Read ingredient lists of food labels every time you shop. When eating out or buying takeaway food, question staff very directly, asking to speak to the chef if any doubt remains.

Buckwheat is *not* one of the 14 allergenic foods that must be declared under UK food labelling law. If you are in doubt about any food, and cannot verify whether buckwheat is an ingredient, you should avoid it.

There are numerous food products in which buckwheat may be used as an ingredient. Widely available foods in the UK that contain buckwheat include multigrain crackers and multigrain granolas/breakfast cereals.

Buckwheat is also increasingly being used in the gourmet and "free-from" food sectors. For example, buckwheat is an ingredient of many gluten-free flours available in UK supermarkets. Some gluten-free beers contain buckwheat as a substitute for grains. Many brands of gluten-free dried pasta contain buckwheat, as do some brands of

gluten-free muesli. Take special care if you are allergic to buckwheat and are also on a gluten-free diet.

People with buckwheat allergy who are travelling out of the UK need to take special care, as buckwheat is more commonly used in some other countries.

Buckwheat flour can be used in making savoury pancakes. In France these are called galettes or crêpes de Sarrasin; in other parts of Europe savoury buckwheat pancakes are called blinis.

One study showed buckwheat to be an emerging allergen in Italy, suggesting its use may be common there. If you are travelling to Italy, look for the phrase “grano saraceno” – which translates as buckwheat.

Buckwheat is a popular food in Eastern Europe, where it is known as “kasha”.

Buckwheat tea is drunk in East Asian countries such as Korea, Japan and China.

Buckwheat is also used in several types of Japanese noodles called “soba” and in an Italian pasta called pizzoccheri.

### What else might I react to?

There have been cases of people allergic to both buckwheat and poppy seeds. This happens because the proteins in these two foods are similar (something known as “cross-reactivity”). Cross-reactivity between buckwheat and rice seeds, and buckwheat and natural rubber latex, have also been reported.

### Buckwheat pillows

A 19-year-old man suffered a severe allergic reaction to buckwheat contained in Dutch pancakes. It was considered likely that he had been sensitised through sleeping on a buckwheat pillow (a pillow stuffed with buckwheat husk). Sensitisation is the process by which an individual develops an allergy to something. There is a theory that many cases of buckwheat allergy in East Asia have been caused by people sleeping on buckwheat pillows.

A case was reported in the USA of a 36-year-old man who experienced anaphylaxis shortly after ingesting a large portion of buckwheat. In the previous two years he had experienced asthma, urticaria (hives), and allergic eye and nose symptoms from sleeping on a buckwheat pillow.

This does not rule out the fact that eating buckwheat could also cause sensitisation.

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### Reviewer

The content of this article has been peer reviewed by Dr Alexandra Croom, Consultant Allergist, Department of Respiratory Medicine, Glenfield Hospital, Leicester.

### Disclosures

Dr Alexandra Croom has no conflicts of interest in respect of their review of this article.

### Disclaimer

The information provided in this article is given in good faith. Every effort is taken to ensure accuracy. All patients are different, and specific cases need specific advice. There is no substitute for good medical advice provided by a medical professional.

### About Anaphylaxis UK

Anaphylaxis UK is the only UK-wide charity solely focused on supporting people at risk of serious, life-threatening allergic reactions. We provide information and support to people living with allergies through our free national helpline and local support groups. We also campaign and fundraise to achieve our ultimate aim, to create a safer environment for all people at risk of serious allergies. Visit our website [www.anaphylaxis.org.uk](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk) and follow us to keep up-to-date with our latest news. We're on Facebook @anaphylaxixUK, LinkedIn, Instagram @anaphylaxisUK, Twitter @AnaphylaxisUK and YouTube.