

Banana allergy

This factsheet is designed to support people who are allergic to bananas, helping you to recognise symptoms and manage your allergy.

What is banana allergy?

Banana is a herb rather than a fruit. It is mainly grown in tropical regions but is exported and eaten worldwide.

An allergic reaction occurs when the body's immune system wrongly identifies a food or substance as a threat. When this happens, the body rapidly releases chemicals, such as histamine. It is the release of these chemicals that causes the allergic symptoms.

These reactions tend to happen very soon after eating banana, usually within seconds or minutes, but rarely can occur up to 2-3 hours later.

In most cases, banana allergy causes mild symptoms, but rarely it can result in a serious reaction called anaphylaxis (pronounced ana-fil-ax-is). If you think you or your child might be allergic to banana, talk to your GP, who may refer you to a specialist.

What are the types of banana allergy?

Many people who are allergic to bananas are also allergic to other fruits or plant foods. The most common reaction is called **oral allergy syndrome** — this means symptoms are usually limited to the mouth and throat, for example itching or mild swelling. These symptoms are usually mild and usually happen straight after eating the banana.

In a small number of people, a banana allergy can trigger a more serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), which affects the whole body and needs immediate emergency treatment. Both are described below.

What is oral allergy syndrome?

There are two types of **oral allergy syndrome**:

Pollen food syndrome

This happens in some people with hay fever (allergic rhinitis) who are allergic to certain pollens from trees, grasses or weeds. Proteins within certain plant foods are so similar

in structure to those present in the pollens that the immune system mistakes them for a threat; this results in allergy symptoms in the mouth or throat when the food is eaten.

This process is known as allergic **cross-reactivity**. The foods involved depend on which pollen is responsible and include a wide range of plant foods, not just banana.

Read more about pollen food syndrome [here](#).

Latex food syndrome

This occurs in some people who are allergic to natural rubber latex (which comes from a tree). In latex food syndrome the proteins within certain plant foods are so similar in structure to those responsible for the latex allergy that the immune system mistakes them as a threat; this results in allergy symptoms when the food is eaten. This is called cross-reactivity and can occur between the proteins in latex and those in banana

Read more about latex food syndrome [here](#).

The mild symptoms in oral allergy syndrome include

- redness, mild swelling or itching of the lips, tongue, inside of the mouth, and ears
- itching and mild swelling of the throat
- sneezing, runny nose, or symptoms affecting the eyes
- occasionally symptoms in the oesophagus (food pipe) or stomach can occur, causing abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting

In most cases, people with pollen food syndrome or latex food syndrome are advised that they **do not need to carry adrenaline**. This is because serious symptoms are unlikely as the allergy-causing proteins in the plant food (in this case banana) are fragile and are often destroyed by stomach acid or by cooking.

Most of the allergens in banana are found in the skin or seeds, so peeling the fruit and removing the black seeds inside may help reduce symptoms.

More serious reactions (anaphylaxis)

A small number of people have a banana allergy that isn't linked to pollen or latex allergy. These individuals are at greater risk of more serious allergic reactions, known as anaphylaxis, which can affect the whole body and require emergency treatment with adrenaline.

More serious symptoms are often referred to as the **ABC** symptoms and include:

- **AIRWAY** - swelling in the throat, tongue or upper airways, hoarse voice, difficulty swallowing.
- **BREATHING** - sudden onset wheezing, breathing difficulty, noisy breathing, persistent cough.
- **CIRCULATION** - dizziness, feeling faint, sudden sleepiness, confusion, pale clammy skin, loss of consciousness or collapse.

Most healthcare professionals consider an allergic reaction to be anaphylaxis when it involves difficulty breathing or results in low blood pressure. Any one or more of the ABC symptoms above may be present.

In extreme cases there could be a dramatic fall in blood pressure. The person may become weak and floppy and may have a sense of something terrible happening. Any of the ABC symptoms may lead to collapse and loss of consciousness and, on rare occasions, can be fatal.

[Read more about anaphylaxis](#)

Lipid transfer protein (LTP) allergy

Banana allergy can sometimes be part of what's known as lipid transfer protein (LTP) syndrome. LTPs are natural proteins found in many fruits, vegetables and some nuts. People with LTP allergy can react to different combinations of these foods. For some, only one or two plant foods cause problems; others may react to more. Which foods you need to avoid should always be discussed with your allergy specialist.

LTP reactions can sometimes be more serious and may only happen when another factor is present — for example, if the person is exercising, drinking alcohol or taking painkillers (like ibuprofen) around the same time as eating the banana.

Find out more about [lipid transfer protein allergy](#).

Getting a diagnosis

If you think you may be allergic to banana, see your GP who can refer you to a specialist allergy clinic if needed. They can find a clinic in your area from the [British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology \(BSACI\)](#).

A specialist referral is important because it will determine whether you have an oral allergy syndrome or more serious banana allergy, and whether you need to carry adrenaline.

During the consultation, the allergy specialist doctor or nurse will ask about the symptoms you had during your allergic reaction as well as ask about your general health. They might perform skin prick tests and/or blood tests to help diagnose the allergy and work out how serious it may be.

[Read more about allergy testing](#)

What can mean you're at higher risk?

You may be at higher risk of a more serious reaction if:

- you have already had a serious reaction, with any of the **'ABC'** symptoms
- you have asthma which is not well controlled
- you have reacted to a tiny amount of banana
- your banana allergy is not due to either pollen food syndrome or latex food syndrome

Poorly controlled asthma can make allergic reactions much worse. Make sure you take your asthma medication as prescribed and let your GP or Allergy Specialist know if your asthma has become worse.

Treating symptoms

If you have mild allergic symptoms associated with oral allergy syndrome, you may be prescribed antihistamine medicine that you take by mouth. But if you are at risk of a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), you may be prescribed adrenaline – the emergency medicine used to treat anaphylaxis. It is also known as epinephrine.

Treating mild symptoms

In milder cases (**without ABC symptoms**) if a reaction does occur, stop eating the food and wash your mouth out with water.

Although a serious reaction is unlikely, you may wish to take an antihistamine tablet. This may help, but symptoms usually disappear quickly on their own (usually in less than two hours), so antihistamine tablets are likely to have little impact.

Treating serious symptoms (anaphylaxis)

Because anaphylaxis can happen very quickly, adrenaline is available in different forms that are designed to be easy to use. It is important to know exactly how and when to use your prescribed adrenaline. Healthcare professionals can show you how to use it, and there are also resources such as practice devices and videos on manufacturer websites.

Options currently available on prescription in the UK include:

- **Adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs)** – such as EpiPen and Jext.
- **Intranasal adrenaline** – EURneffy, a needle-free nasal spray.

You must carry two in-date forms of prescribed adrenaline **at all times** as a second dose may be needed if symptoms do not improve after five minutes or get worse.

[Find out more about what to do in an emergency.](#)

[Find out more about adrenaline.](#)

Managing banana allergy

Avoiding banana

Once you have been diagnosed with banana allergy, you will need to avoid banana and foods that contain it.

Every time you shop, you should carefully read the ingredients lists on food packets. Banana is **NOT** included in the list of 14 major food allergens in the UK. This means it will be listed as an ingredient but not highlighted in bold.

Read the ingredient list every time you buy a product as manufacturers may change their recipes.

In milder cases related to oral allergy syndrome, avoiding bananas is still important. However, many people with banana allergy related to these conditions can tolerate banana once it has been cooked. This is because the protein that causes the reaction is destroyed by heat. Trying cooked banana is only safe if you have had mild symptoms and confirmed oral allergy syndrome.

When eating out

Restaurants, cafes, hotels, takeaways and other catering businesses are **NOT** required by law to provide information about ingredients that are not included in the top 14

major food allergens. This means you will need to ask staff directly if the food you'd like to buy contains banana and if there is a risk of cross-contamination. Let them know that even small quantities can cause an allergic reaction and don't be afraid to ask staff to check with the chef.

[Read more about shopping and preparing food](#)

Which foods can contain banana?

- Fruit salads
- Fruit yoghurts
- Smoothies and fruit drinks
- Desserts
- Pre-packaged frozen fruits
- Breakfast cereals
- Energy bars and breakfast bars
- Baby food
- Ice cream
- Banana bread, cake and muffins

Synthetic banana flavouring should not cause problems, but natural flavouring can trigger reactions. It is important to avoid banana flavoured medications and mouth washes. Shampoos and body lotions may also be banana scented, and care should be taken with all personal care products and toiletries.

[Read more about cosmetics and medicines for people with food allergies](#)

What else might I react to?

If you are allergic to bananas due to cross-reactivity with latex you may also react to other fruits including avocado, kiwi and chestnut, as well as latex itself.

Find out more about latex allergy [here](#).

People with a banana allergy due to pollen food syndrome sometimes also experience oral reactions to other fruits such as peach, olive and tomato, and raw vegetables such as bell pepper and carrot.

Find out more about pollen food syndrome [here](#).

Individuals with banana allergy due to lipid transfer protein syndrome may react to other plant foods and will need tailor made allergen avoidance advice from a specialist clinic.

Find out more about lipid transfer protein syndrome [here](#).

Key messages

- If you know or suspect you have a banana allergy, visit your GP.
- If you are prescribed adrenaline, carry **two** devices with you **at all times**.
- If you are allergic to banana you will need to avoid it and foods that contain it.
- If you have asthma, make sure it is well managed.

Feedback

Please help us to improve our information resources by sending us your feedback at: -

<https://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/information-resources-feedback/>

Sources

All the information we produce is evidence based or follows expert opinion and is checked by our clinical and research reviewers. If you wish to know the sources we used in producing any of our information products, please contact info@anaphylaxis.org.uk and we will gladly supply details.

Reviewer

The content of this factsheet has been peer-reviewed by Dr. Alexandra Croom consultant allergist.

Disclosures

We are not aware of any conflicts of interest in relation to the review of this factsheet.

Disclaimer

The information provided in this factsheet 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. We also 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 and follow us to keep up-to-date with our latest news. We're on Facebook @anaphylaxisUK, LinkedIn, Instagram @anaphylaxisUK, and you can find our podcast [here](#).