

## Buckwheat allergy

Buckwheat is a flowering plant that produces grain-like seeds that are used to make flour. It's not related to wheat so is sometimes used in gluten-free products as well as multigrain cereals and other foods. Buckwheat allergy is unusual in the UK, but speak to your GP if you have had any allergic reactions.

### What is buckwheat allergy?

Buckwheat allergy is a type of food allergy. Food allergy occurs when the body's immune system wrongly identifies a food as a threat. When this happens, the body releases chemicals, such as histamine, in response. It is the release of these chemicals that causes symptoms.

Buckwheat allergy is common in Japan and Korea, and there are reports of it causing serious allergic reactions elsewhere, including in Europe. It's rare in the UK, but as the use of buckwheat becomes more widespread, it could become more common.

### Are wheat and buckwheat allergy related?

Despite its name, buckwheat is not in the same plant family as wheat. Buckwheat is not a cereal and it's not a member of the grass family. It's related to sorrels, docks, bindweed and rhubarb.

As wheat and buckwheat are not related, there is no reason why people with a wheat allergy would react to buckwheat.

### What are the symptoms of buckwheat allergy?

The symptoms of a buckwheat allergy usually come on quickly, within minutes of eating the food.

**Mild to moderate** symptoms may include:

- a red raised rash (known as hives or urticaria) anywhere on the body.
- a tingling or itchy feeling in the mouth.

Page 1 of 7

- swelling of lips, face or eyes.
- stomach pain or vomiting.

## More serious symptoms

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

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

The term for this more serious reaction is **anaphylaxis** (pronounced ana-fil-ax-is).

Most healthcare professionals consider an allergic reaction to be anaphylaxis when it involves difficulty breathing or affects the heart rhythm or 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.](#)

## Getting a diagnosis

If you think you may be allergic to buckwheat, 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 \(BSACI\)](#).

It's important to get a referral even if your symptoms were mild because it can be hard to tell if future allergic reactions could be more serious.

Once you get a referral, the consultant will discuss your medical history and symptoms with you. They might suggest skin prick tests, blood tests, and food challenge tests to help diagnose the allergy and work out how serious it may be.

Buckwheat allergy could be missed when trying to make a diagnosis because it's so unusual and could be diagnosed as [idiopathic anaphylaxis](#).

[Read more about allergy testing.](#)

## What can mean you're at higher risk?

Some clues that you might be at higher risk of more serious reactions are:

- you have already had a serious reaction, with any of the **ABC** symptoms.
- you have asthma, especially if it is not well controlled.
- you have reacted to a tiny amount of buckwheat.

If you have asthma and it is not well controlled, this could make an allergic reaction worse. Make sure you discuss this with your GP or allergy specialist and take any prescribed medicines.

## Treating symptoms

If you have mild allergic symptoms, you may be prescribed antihistamine medicine that you take by mouth. If you are at higher risk of anaphylaxis, you may be prescribed adrenaline to use in an emergency.

Adrenaline comes in pre-loaded adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs) that are designed to be easy to use. Make sure you know how and when to use them. Ask your healthcare professional to show you how to use your specific brand of AAI. You can also find help and training videos on the manufacturer's website and get a free trainer device to practise with.

## Adrenaline auto-injectors

The adrenaline auto-injectors prescribed in the UK are:

- [EpiPen](#)
- [Jext](#)

You must carry **two** AAIs with you **at all times**, as you may need to use a second one if your symptoms don't improve after five minutes or get worse.

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

## Avoiding buckwheat

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

Read the ingredient lists on food packets carefully every time you shop. Buckwheat is NOT included in the list of top 14 major food allergens in the UK. This means it will normally be listed as an ingredient on the label but it won't be emphasised, in bold for example.

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

## 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 buckwheat 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 about shopping and preparing food.](#)

## Which foods contain buckwheat in the UK?

Buckwheat can be used as an ingredient in various foods, often as a substitute for grains like wheat or rice. Some common foods made with buckwheat in the UK are:

- multigrain crackers, granolas and breakfast cereals
- 'free-from' and gluten-free foods including flour, bread, pasta and muesli
- gluten-free beer

Check labels carefully if you're allergic to buckwheat and you eat a gluten-free diet.

## Foods from other parts of the world

Buckwheat is used more commonly in other countries. If you're travelling outside of the UK, look out for the following terms and types of foods.

- In France, look for the phrase “blé noir”, which means buckwheat. Savoury pancakes, known as galettes or crêpes in France and blinis in other parts of Europe, can be made with buckwheat flour.
- In Italy, look for the phrase “grano saraceno”, which means buckwheat. It’s used in an Italian pasta called pizzoccheri for example.
- Buckwheat is a popular food in Eastern Europe, where it is known as “kasha”.
- In East Asian countries such as Korea, Japan and China, buckwheat is made into a tea.
- Buckwheat is also used in several types of Japanese noodles called “soba”.

## What else might I react to?

People with buckwheat allergy have also been known to react to:

- poppy seeds
- rice seeds
- coconut
- natural rubber latex

This is known as cross-reactivity, where the proteins in one food are similar to the proteins in another. It’s the proteins that cause the allergic reaction.

Cross-reactivity between buckwheat and these foods occur at a **low rate**. Current allergen guidance does not recommend **routine avoidance** of these foods for individuals with a buckwheat allergy unless they have experienced allergic symptoms. If you believe you may be allergic to or react to any of these, please consult your GP or an allergy specialist.

## Buckwheat pillows

Buckwheat can occasionally be used as a filling in pillows.

It is possible that some cases of buckwheat allergy, especially in East Asia, have been caused by sleeping on buckwheat pillows.

There have been reports of serious reactions to eating foods containing buckwheat, such as pancakes, in people who have used buckwheat pillows. It’s possible that they



# anaphylaxis UK

A brighter future for people with serious allergies

became sensitised to buckwheat through the pillows, which are filled with buckwheat husks.

'Sensitised' means your immune system has produced antibodies to buckwheat after coming into contact with it. If you come into contact with buckwheat again in future, you could have an allergic reaction. Eating buckwheat could also cause sensitisation.

Buckwheat pillows are not widely used in the UK, but they are available for purchase through specialist retailers and online platforms. They are more commonly used in countries like Japan and the US, where they are valued for their firmness, breathability, and potential benefits for neck support. While not mainstream in the UK, they may be found in niche markets, particularly among people looking for natural or orthopaedic pillow options.

Individuals with a buckwheat allergy should avoid using these pillows.

## Key messages

- Buckwheat allergy is unusual in the UK, but is more common in other parts of the world.
- Buckwheat is not one of the top 14 allergens and is not the same as the top 14 allergen '**wheat**,' so it may not always be highlighted on ingredient labels—**check food labels carefully**.
- Visit your GP if you think you might have an allergy to buckwheat.
- If you are allergic to buckwheat, you will need to avoid it and foods that contain it.
- If you are prescribed adrenaline auto-injectors (AAIs), carry them with you **at all times**.

## 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

Page 6 of 7



# anaphylaxis UK

A brighter future for people with serious allergies

in producing any of our information products, please contact [info@anaphylaxis.org.uk](mailto:info@anaphylaxis.org.uk) and we will gladly supply details.

## Reviewer

The content of this factsheet has been peer-reviewed by Dr Matthew Doyle MBBS FRCP FRCGP, General Practitioner with a specialist interest in Allergic Disease.

## 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](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk) and follow us to keep up-to-date with our latest news. We're on Facebook @anaphylaxisUK, LinkedIn, Instagram @anaphylaxisUK, Twitter @AnaphylaxisUK and you can find our podcast [here](#).