

Kiwifruit allergy

Allergy to kiwifruit can sometimes lead to anaphylaxis, so if you think you or your child may be allergic to kiwifruit, speak to your GP. They can refer you to an allergy specialist if needed.

What is kiwifruit allergy?

Kiwifruit 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.

Allergy to kiwifruit, also known as the Chinese gooseberry, started to become common in the UK in the 1980s after it was introduced to our diet from New Zealand in the late 60s.

The most common cause of allergic reactions to kiwifruit in adults in the UK is a condition known as pollen food syndrome, and the symptoms tend to be mild. It's possible to have more serious reactions to kiwifruit which are not related to pollen. This is more common in children.

What is pollen food syndrome?

[Pollen food syndrome](#) can cause allergic reactions when you eat certain fruits or vegetables. This is because the proteins in pollen are similar to the proteins in some fruits and vegetables. It usually occurs in people with hay fever who are allergic to pollen.

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

What are the symptoms of pollen food syndrome?

Symptoms are usually mild and may respond to antihistamines, but speak to your doctor to make sure this is the right treatment for you.

Symptoms of pollen food syndrome usually include:

- redness, mild swelling or itching of the lips, tongue, inside of the mouth, soft palate and ears
- itching and mild swelling of the throat that doesn't interfere with your breathing
- occasionally, people might also have symptoms in the oesophagus (food pipe) or stomach, causing abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting
- sneezing, runny nose, or symptoms affecting the eyes.

Rarely, more serious symptoms can occur, known as anaphylaxis (pronounced anna-fill-axis).

For people with pollen food syndrome, serious symptoms are unusual because the proteins that cause the allergy are unstable and are destroyed with heat or once they reach the stomach. Most people with pollen food syndrome have allergic reactions if they eat the raw fruit or vegetables, but they are able to eat the cooked fruit or vegetables without any problem.

More serious symptoms

More serious symptoms of kiwifruit allergy 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).
- 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 anna-fill-axis).

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 kiwifruit, 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.

[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 kiwifruit.

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 practice with.

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.](#)

Will I react to anything else?

Pollen food syndrome is the most common cause of kiwifruit allergy. It means you might react to other raw fresh fruits and vegetables that have similar proteins to pollen. People who are allergic to latex might also find they react to kiwi and other foods such as avocado, banana and chestnut because the proteins in these foods are similar to latex. This is called Latex-food syndrome.

If you have kiwifruit allergy and react to another food or substance, let your allergist know.

Avoiding kiwifruit

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

Read the ingredient lists on food packets carefully every time you shop. Kiwifruit 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 highlighted, 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 kiwifruit 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 can contain kiwifruit?

- Jams
- Fruit yoghurts
- Fruit salads
- Pre-packaged frozen fruits
- Desserts
- Sweets
- Smoothies and fruit drinks
- Sorbet and ice creams
- Tenderised meat
- Pâté glaze

Apart from the familiar green kiwifruit, there are other varieties to look out for. These include the Zespri gold which could be mistaken for melon in a fruit salad, and kiwi berries. There is not enough research to know if different varieties could cause more serious reactions so it's safest to avoid them all.

Be aware that foods that contain a mixture of fruits can contain kiwifruit but won't always include it in the name, so make sure you check the ingredients.

Key messages

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- If you think you have a food allergy, visit your GP.
- If you are prescribed adrenaline auto-injectors, carry two with you at all times.
- Know how to use your adrenaline auto-injectors and what to do in an emergency.
- Read food labels carefully and question staff in restaurants, takeaways and anywhere you eat out of home.
- If you have asthma, make sure it's 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 Matt Doyle, full time GP in Jersey and Chair of the BSACI Primary Care Committee.

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

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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, Twitter @AnaphylaxisUK and YouTube.

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