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Legumes and pulses allergy

Legumes such as lentils, chickpeas and peas – and their dried seeds known as pulses – are widely used in everyday cooking and are becoming increasingly common in manufactured foods. They are frequently added to free-from and plant-based products, often in concentrated forms as sources of protein or fibre. If you think you might be allergic to any legumes or pulses, this page will help you understand and manage your allergy.

What are legumes and pulses?

Legumes are a family of plants (the Fabaceae family) that produce seeds in pods. Common examples include peanuts, soybeans, lupin, green beans, green peas, lentils, chickpeas and fenugreek.

Pulses are a subgroup of legumes — they are the **dried edible seeds** of these plants. Pulses include chickpeas, lentils, kidney beans and other dried beans. (Peanuts and soya are legumes but are usually not classed as pulses because they are oilseeds or eaten as fresh/processed rather than dried.)

In the UK, **peanut and soya allergies** are the most frequently reported legume-related allergies; see our dedicated factsheets on peanut allergy and soya allergy for more details. These, along with **lupin**, are considered priority allergens in the UK, meaning they must be clearly highlighted on ingredients lists.

This factsheet focuses on **other legumes and pulses** (for example, lentils, chickpeas and peas), which are emerging causes of food allergy and are increasingly used in manufactured foods. At present, these legumes are **not priority allergens**, so they do **NOT** have to be emphasised on ingredient labels. **People with these allergies, therefore, need to read ingredient lists carefully every time they shop or eat pre-packaged foods.**

What is a legume allergy?

Legume 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.

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

What are the symptoms of a legume allergy?

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

Mild to **moderate** symptoms may include:

- a red raised itchy rash (known as hives or urticaria) anywhere on the body
- swelling of the face, lips and/or eyes
- a tingling or itchy feeling in the mouth
- mild throat tightness
- stomach pain, vomiting or diarrhoea

More serious symptoms are often referred to as the **ABC** symptoms and can 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.

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

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 unconsciousness and, on rare occasions, can be fatal.

Most healthcare professionals consider an allergic reaction to be anaphylaxis when it involves the ABC symptoms.

Read more about anaphylaxis.

Occupational or Inhaled Legume Allergy

Some people can develop allergies to legumes through inhaling airborne particles, especially in workplaces where legume powders, flours, or dust are handled regularly. This is called occupational allergy and can cause symptoms such as:

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- Nasal symptoms like sneezing, runny or blocked nose (rhinitis)
- Itchy, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Coughing, wheezing, or difficulty breathing (occupational asthma)
- Skin reactions like itching or hives (urticaria)

Occupational legume allergy is most commonly reported in industries processing lupin, pea, or other legume flours and proteins. The allergic reaction occurs because proteins from the legume become airborne and are inhaled, triggering immune responses in sensitised individuals.

If you work with legume powders or dust and experience respiratory or skin symptoms, it is important to seek medical advice. Early diagnosis and workplace adjustments (such as protective equipment or job change) can help prevent more serious reactions.

Getting a diagnosis

If you think you may be allergic to a legume, 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, blood tests, and food challenge tests to help diagnose the allergy and work out how serious it may be.

Read more about allergy testing.

Some clues that you might be at higher risk 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 the food.

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

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If you have mild allergic symptoms, you may be prescribed an 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.

Because anaphylaxis can happen very quickly, adrenaline is available in different forms that are designed to be easy to use. It's 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.

How common are legume allergies?

Peanut and soya are the most common legume allergies in the UK. However, other legumes — such as lentils, chickpeas, peas and beans — can also cause allergic reactions, including anaphylaxis.

- Allergies to legumes other than peanut and soya are generally less common; however, **lentils, chickpeas and peas** are increasingly recognised as **emerging allergens**. This may relate to their growing use as ingredients in everyday foods. We currently do not know how common these allergies are in the UK due to limited information.
- In recent years, reports of anaphylaxis caused by legumes have increased, reaching nearly 1/4 of all food-induced anaphylaxis cases. Peanuts remain the most frequent cause, followed by soybeans, peas, lentils, chickpeas, beans and lupin.
- Recent reviews have reported more case reports of reactions to non-priority legumes (e.g. peas and lentils) in recent years, but population-level data are limited, so larger studies are needed to confirm a clear trend.

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- The likelihood of allergy to a particular legume is influenced by local eating habits (for example, lentil and chickpea allergies are more frequent in Mediterranean and some Asian populations).
- Some people have positive allergy tests to certain legumes but do not experience any symptoms when eating them. Test results should always be interpreted by an allergy specialist.

Work is currently under way to assess whether some non-priority legumes that are increasingly reported to cause allergic reactions should be added to the UK priority allergen list. Because prevalence and dietary patterns vary between countries, any change requires large, multinational evidence and regulatory review — although a recent European study has highlighted peas and lentils as candidates for inclusion.

Will you be allergic to more than one legume?

- If you eat other legumes regularly without symptoms, there is no need to avoid them — unless your allergy specialist advises you to.
- There is a possibility that if you are allergic to one legume, you might react to another. This is known as **cross-reactivity** and can happen when the proteins in different legumes are similar enough for the immune system to mistake one for another. Which legumes cross-react varies by person, so anyone worried should check with their allergy specialist.
- Many people with a legume allergy react to only one type of legume, while others may be allergic to more.
- The exact number of people allergic to multiple legumes is uncertain, as research findings differ. If you are worried you might react to additional legumes, contact your GP or allergy specialist — they can advise which foods are safe and whether you need further testing or a supervised oral food challenge.

Avoiding legumes

Only peanuts, soya and lupin are included in the list of top 14 major food allergens in the UK. This means they must be highlighted on food ingredients labels, in bold or underlined for example.

All other legumes and pulses (including lentils, peas and chickpeas) are **NOT** included in the UK Top 14 allergen list. This means they will not be highlighted on food labels, although they must still be listed in the ingredients. **As they are now more widely**

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used in manufactured foods, people with these allergies need to read ingredients very carefully to avoid accidental exposure.

When you're shopping

To avoid any legumes you're allergic to read the ingredient lists on food packets carefully every time you shop.

When eating out

When you buy catered food, such as in restaurants and takeaways, speak to staff directly as they may not be aware that legumes can cause allergic reactions. Make sure you name the specific legume or pulse you're allergic to.

Read more about eating out safely here

Reactions to legume 'protein'

Legume-derived proteins (such as pea, soya, lentil, and chickpea protein) are becoming increasingly common in everyday foods, especially as plant-based diets grow in popularity. This creates new risks for people with legume allergies, as these proteins may appear in unexpected places and can cause allergic reactions.

Common products containing legume proteins:

- Meat products (sausages, sliced meats, meatballs)
- Plant-based meat alternatives
- Milk and dairy substitutes
- Soups, sauces, and cereals
- Baking mixes, baked goods, gluten-free foods

Because allergic reactions are triggered by proteins, highly concentrated legume protein ingredients (e.g., pea protein isolate, chickpea flour) can cause more serious reactions for those with legume allergies. Many people may not expect these ingredients in processed or "free-from" foods.

Clear and visible labelling of specific legume proteins (such as pea, lentil, or chickpea protein) is important for protecting consumers with allergies. Rising use of pea protein, in particular, has led to more reports of allergic reactions — and the prevalence of pea protein and other legume protein allergies may rise if ingredient use expands.

Hidden legumes

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Some foods and ingredients can contain legume proteins or fibres even if "legume" is not listed in the name. If you're still experiencing symptoms after avoiding obvious sources, check for these hidden ingredients:

- Vegetable protein
- Vegetable fibre
- Textured vegetable protein
- Plant protein isolate
- Hydrolysed vegetable protein

These terms are sometimes used on food labels to describe ingredients made from peas, soya, lentils, chickpeas, or beans.

Manufacturers are not allowed to "hide" **single-ingredient legumes** within generic terms like "vegetable protein" or "plant protein"—the specific source (e.g., "pea protein") must be used if it is a deliberate ingredient.

However, generic terms such as "vegetable protein" can be used if the ingredient comes from a **mixture of vegetable sources**, or if the protein is **highly processed** and its origin is **not a single specified legume**.

Always read the full ingredients list and contact the manufacturer if terms such as "vegetable protein" or "plant protein" do not name the source. If you have unexpected symptoms after eating a product, report the reaction to the manufacturer and to your GP or allergy clinic — ongoing reporting and clearer labelling help keep everyone safer.

Examples of legumes, pulses, and the foods they're found in

The table shows examples of legumes and the products you might find them in. Remember, it is rare that you would need to avoid many of these. It's very unusual to react to all legumes.

Legume or ingredient	Foods they may be found in
Acacia gum/gum arabic (E414)	Yoghurt; jelly; sauces (sweet and savoury); lollies and frozen desserts; confectionery.
Adzuki bean	Cooked dishes such as curries, casseroles, chilli dishes, and vegetarian meals.

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Legume or ingredient	Foods they may be found in
Bean sprouts	Asian dishes and sides, including Thai salads, sweet and sour dishes, Chinese meals, and spring rolls.
Black gram	Indian dips and cooked dishes such as chilli, vegetarian, and vegan meals.
Black-eyed beans	Curries, casseroles, chilli dishes, vegetarian meals; some cakes (especially low GI or vegan cakes).
Broad bean (faba, fava, Windsor bean)	Hummus-style dips; some coconut milks; protein shakes and high-protein foods; coatings in snack foods, vegan products, bakery and gluten-free items.
Butter bean (lima, Madagascar bean)	Dips; cooked dishes such as chilli, vegetarian and vegan meals.
Carob/carob gum/locust bean gum (E410)	Lollies; drinks (including fizzy drinks and hot drinks); sweets; Carobel thickener; chocolate substitute.
Chickpea/Bengal gram/gram flour/besan	Hummus; Indian dishes (onion bhajis, chickpea poppadoms); vegetarian meals; roasted snacks; vegan meringue; chickpea pasta and flour.
Fenugreek (Menthi)	Indian food; spice mixes; spiced breads such as naan.
Flageolet bean	Dips; chilli and vegetarian or vegan dishes.
French bean/green bean/snap bean/string bean/runner bean	Cooked vegetable dishes, stir-fries, salads, casseroles, stews, frozen vegetable mixes, and ready meals.
Guar gum/guaran/cluster bean (E412)	Yoghurts; jellies; jams; lollies.
Haricot bean (navy bean, baked beans)	Dips; chilli and vegetarian or vegan meals.

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Legume or ingredient	Foods they may be found in
Karaya gum/tragacanth gum (E413)	Yoghurts; jellies; jams; lollies; sauces and salad dressings; ice cream.
Kidney bean	Dips; chilli dishes; vegetarian and vegan meals.
Lentils (all types, including cow peas/cowpeas)	Dips; Indian side dishes such as poppadoms; lentil crisps; snacks; lentil flour.
Liquorice (root of Glycyrrhiza glabra, a legume)	Sweets and confectionery; liquorice; sambuca liqueur.
Lupin	Pastries; coated fried vegetables (e.g. onion rings); gluten-free foods; doughnuts; pizzas; pasta; French and Italian bakery products.
Mangetout/sugar snap peas/snow peas	Salads; stir-fries; vegetable sides; frozen vegetable mixes.
Mung bean (green gram, golden gram)	Bean dishes; vegan cakes.
E479b (modified soya bean oil)	Margarine and spreads; baked goods; snacks and processed foods.
Peanut (groundnut, monkey nut)	Satay dip or marinade; nut mixes; peanut flour; Bamba maize snacks; BBQ foods; salads; dressings; Thai cuisine.
Peas (green, marrowfat, mushy, pea shoots)	Sausages; vegan foods; crisps; chips; pea snacks; wasabi peas; pea protein (in shakes, dairy alternatives, vegan meat substitutes); pea pasta.
Pinto bean	Refried beans; burritos; chilli; soups (common in Tex-Mex cuisine).
Red gram/pigeon pea (gungo pea)	Chilli and vegetarian dishes; dips; Jamaican cuisine.
Rice bean	Dips; chilli and vegetarian or vegan dishes.

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Legume or ingredient	Foods they may be found in
Soy/soya bean/tofu/edamame (including E416 soya hemicellulose, soya oil)	Tofu and soy curd; vegan omelettes; dairy alternatives; soy/tamari sauce; manufactured foods.
Tamarind	Worcestershire sauce; tamarind paste; tamari sauce.
Tara gum (E417)	Sauces; salad dressings; ice cream; jellies.
Textured vegetable protein (TVP)	Vegan and vegetarian meat substitutes; burgers; sausages. Usually made from soy but may include pea or other legume protein.
Tonka bean	Flavouring in confectionery and desserts (restricted in food use in some countries).
Winged bean (asparagus pea, goa bean)	Dips; chilli dishes; vegetarian and vegan meals.

If you find you can eat any of the above legumes without having a reaction, then you can keep eating them.

The following are not legumes

You don't need to avoid these ingredients which are used as thickeners and gelling agents. They are **not made from legumes and pulses.**

- Agar (E406) – a carbohydrate found in seaweed.
- Carrageenan gum (E407) – a carbohydrate found in seaweed.
- Gellan gum (E418) – is a water-soluble polysaccharide produced by fermentation with the bacterium Sphingomonas elodea.
- Xantham gum (E415) – a carbohydrate produced by a bacteria called Xanthomonas campestris pv. Campestris.

All of these ingredients are **not** derived from legumes or pulses, and are generally used to provide thickness, stability, or gelling properties in foods.

Key messages

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- If you have symptoms after eating any legumes, visit your GP.
- If you are prescribed adrenaline, carry **two** devices with you **at all times.**
- Read food labels carefully and ask staff about ingredients in restaurants, takeaways and cafes.
- Always be guided by your allergy specialist on which foods to avoid.
- If you have asthma, make sure it is well managed. See your GP about this.

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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. Isabel Skypala, Consultant Allergy Dietitian and Clinical Lead for Food Allergy at Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Foundation Trust.

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 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 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.

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