



Asthma & Food

Do you think that food is triggering your asthma?

We all enjoy a variety of foods in a variety of settings as part of a healthful lifestyle. There are numerous natural components, compounds, or other agents in the foods that we eat. For years, it has been suspected that foods or food ingredients may cause or exacerbate symptoms in those with asthma. After many years of scientific and clinical investigation, there are very few confirmed food triggers to asthma.

Of the 10 million Americans (3-4%) with asthma, food triggered asthma is unusual, occurring only among 6-8% of asthmatic children and less than 2% of asthmatic adults. Patients are more likely to experience fatal food-induced anaphylaxis than asthma triggered by food.

What are Major Triggers of Asthma?

There are many factors that can trigger an asthma attack.

Do Foods Trigger Asthma?

Food triggered asthma is unusual. Although food allergies may trigger asthma in a small number of people, not all individuals with food allergies have asthma. Substantial scientific investigation has found that the following foods and food additives can trigger asthma.

Diagnosed food allergens such as:

- Milk
- Eggs
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts
- Soy
- Wheat
- Fish
- Shellfish

Sulfites and sulfating agents:

- Sulfur dioxide
- Sodium bisulfite
- Potassium bisulfite
- Sodium metabisulfite
- Potassium metabisulfite
- Sodium sulfite

Where are Sulfites Found?

Sulfites or sulfating agents, both occurring naturally or used in food processing, have been found to trigger asthma. If sulfites are used in food preparation or processing as a preservative agents, you will find them listed on the food label. Common food sources of sulfites include

- Dried fruits or vegetables
- Potatoes (some packaged and prepared)
- Wine
- Beer
- Bottled lemon or lime juice
- Shrimp (fresh, frozen, or prepared)
- Pickled foods, such as pickles, peppers, relishes or sauerkraut (some)

Do other food ingredients trigger asthma?

Other food ingredients have been previously suspected to trigger asthma. However, scientific evaluation has not been able to conclusively link these food components to asthma. They include tartrazine (and other food dyes or colorings); benzoates (food and drug preservative); BHA and BHT (food preservatives); monosodium glutamate (MSG, flavor enhancer); aspartame (NutraSweet, intense sweetener); and nitrate and nitrite (food preservatives).

What can you do to prevent asthma triggered by foods?

The best way to avoid food-induced or aggravated asthma is by avoiding or eliminating the food or food ingredient from your diet or the environment. Remember that these substances can be both released into the air or consumed when eating or drinking.

Reading ingredient labels on food packages and knowing where food triggers are found in foods are your best protections against an asthma attack.

By working with your Asthma & Allergy Center clinician on a care plan and proper use of medications, you will be prepared to act in case of an asthma attack.

Adapted from International Food Information Council Foundation