

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment please speak to a member of staff or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

Freephone: 0800 183 0204

From a mobile or abroad: 0115 924 9924 ext 65412 or 62301

E-mail: pals@nuh.nhs.uk

Letter: NUH NHS Trust, c/o PALS, Freepost NEA 14614, Nottingham NG7 1BR

www.nuh.nhs.uk

Shellfish or fish allergy

Information for parents

This information can be provided in different languages and formats. For more information please contact the:

Children's Clinic
Tel: 0115 9249924 ext. 62661/64008

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.

This leaflet has been adapted from the leaflet produced for the adult immunology department. Original leaflet produced by Lisa Slater.

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Nottingham Children's Hospital



Public information

We are here for you

Shellfish or Fish Allergy

Allergy to **fish** – such as cod and other white fish is likely to be life-long and may begin in childhood.

Adverse reactions to **shellfish** are not usually seen until the teenage years or adulthood. This may be because shellfish is not often a part of the diet of younger children.

Symptoms

Mild symptoms may include:

- Tummy pain and vomiting
- Itching
- Redness
- Urticaria (nettle rash or hives), often around the mouth
- Swelling e.g. in the lips
- Cough

Symptoms in severe cases may include:

- Wheeze
- Anaphylaxis (throat swelling / choking, breathing difficulty and collapse)

Those at risk of severe reactions should carry preloaded adrenaline (EpiPen/Jext) at all times in order to treat one of these severe reactions. If you have been told you need an EpiPen/Jext in clinic today you should have been shown how to use it. If you have not been shown how to use it, please contact Debra Forster (details on page 7).

If you use an EpiPen/Jext you must always call an ambulance. You should also carry an antihistamine to treat mild reactions.

Some people may get a rash on skin contact with fish. Some individuals may have an allergic reaction to airborne particles of shellfish or fish allergen in open fish markets or when cooking.

Additional support

Contact details

Debra Forster, Children's Respiratory & Allergy Nurse
Children's Clinic South
B Floor, Nottingham Children's Hospital
Queen's Medical Centre
Nottingham NG7 2UH

Tel: 0115 9249924 ext 62501

The Anaphylaxis Campaign is a national charity that can provide support and information.

The Anaphylaxis Campaign
P.O. Box 275
Farnborough
Hampshire
GU14 6SX

Helpline: 01252 542029

www.anaphylaxis.org.uk

www.allergyuk.org

Visit these websites to access a free demonstration of EpiPen or Jext:

EpiPen

www.epipen.co.uk

Jext

www.jext.co.uk

Non-allergic reactions to Fish/Shellfish

Adverse reactions to fish do not always mean you have an allergy.

Some people who think they are reacting to seafood are actually having a reaction to a worm-like parasite called *Anisakis* (also known as the **Cod Worm**). This parasite, relatively common in Spain, can cause urticaria, stomach and bowel upset or even anaphylaxis when present in fresh cephalopods, or hake, anchovy or cod. If you react to a fish on one occasion but subsequently eat it with no problem the Cod Worm may be responsible.

Histamine, sometimes present in spoiled fish (especially tuna and mackerel), can cause a condition similar to allergy called **scrombroid poisoning**. Unlike allergy, this would affect everyone who consumed the offending food.

Shellfish/fish sometimes absorb poison from toxic algal blooms, which appear in the waters at certain times of year. These can affect the gut and nervous system.

Dietary management

Fish and shellfish are made of different proteins. People who are allergic to shellfish may be able to eat fish and vice-versa – unless they have both allergies. Be aware of the risk of cross contamination in restaurants, markets and open fish counters. Check on how the fish is being displayed and handled.

Fish allergy

Someone who reacts to one type of fish may be advised to eliminate all fish from their diet as they may react to other types of fish.

Shellfish allergy

Shellfish can be divided into four main groups:

1. **Crustaceans** (includes - lobster, crab, crayfish, shrimp and prawn)
2. **Mollusc Bivalves** (includes - mussels, oysters, scallops and clams)
3. **Mollusc Gastropods** (includes - limpets, periwinkles and snails)
4. **Mollusc Cephalopods** (includes - squid, cuttlefish and octopus)

People who have reacted to one type of shellfish (e.g. crab) are likely to react to other members of the same group (in this case other crustaceans). If a person reacts to crab, they should avoid that and the rest of the crustacean group. If a person reacts to squid, they should avoid the rest of the cephalopod group.

Shellfish from the other groups may not necessarily present a problem, although they may do for some people and there is always the risk of cross contamination.

In restaurants, inform staff that you have a shellfish or fish allergy. Find out what your food is fried in, and whether the oil has been used for other fish/shellfish.

Always check labels for the sort of fish/shellfish you are allergic to. Be vigilant when choosing stocks and soups and highly processed foods, which may contain shellfish or fish extract to add flavour.

Foods which regularly contain fish/shellfish include:

- Paella
- Bouillabaisse,
- Gumbo (a Tex Mex dish)
- Frito misto (a mixed fried fish dish)
- Fruits de mer.
- Oriental food
- Surumi is usually made from white fish but can contain shellfish extract - this may be present in pizza toppings and other processed foods
- Caesar salad (dressing usually contains anchovies)
- Worcestershire sauce
- Caponata (can contain anchovies)
- Kedgeree
- Fish Sauce/Nuoc Mam/Nam Pla
- Patum Peparium (Gentleman's Relish)

This is not an exhaustive list. Fish/Shellfish can turn up unexpectedly in foods so it is important to check food labels when you shop and ask about ingredients and preparation in restaurants - even if you have bought the product before. Recipes do sometimes change.

Food labelling

Under new European Legislation even small amounts of fish/shellfish must be declared on food packaging. Food companies now have to label all major allergens.

Iodine

People with a shellfish allergy have in the past been warned against iodine, an element present in items including shellfish, seaweed and cleaning products. **Iodine allergy is unrelated to fish/shellfish allergy.** The allergic protein present in shellfish is not iodine but a muscle protein in the flesh. This traditional advice is therefore now invalid.

Medicines, supplements and toiletries

Although it is the flesh of shellfish that contains the allergen, people with shellfish allergy are advised to avoid shellfish shells and those with a fish allergy should also avoid the fish skeletons.

Glucosamine, used in the treatment of arthritis, is derived from shellfish and is unsuitable for anyone with a shellfish allergy. Chondroitin is a shellfish-free alternative.

Chitin, derived from shellfish shells, is used in commercial "fat absorbers" such as Chitosan HD, and should be avoided. Some moisturisers can also contain shellfish-derived chitin. Some calcium supplements may contain ground oyster shells. Grazax (grass pollen tablet) also contains fish gelatine.