

The Allergy & Asthma Clinic

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Sesame Allergy

Sesame allergy has increased over the years and sesame allergy is now the 9th most common food allergy in the United States. With that said, because the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2014 only require the top 8 allergens be written on food labels, there is a potential for those allergic to sesame to inadvertently consume sesame and develop an adverse reaction. Dr. Ruchi Gupta, Professor of Pediatrics and Medicine at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine is lead author of an important study on sesame. “It is important to advocate for labeling sesame in packaged food. Sesame is in a lot of foods as hidden ingredients. It is very hard to avoid.” It is estimated that more than 1.5 million Americans may have an allergy to sesame allergy and approximately 1.1 million children and adults are likely to have a diagnosed sesame allergy or a history of sesame allergic reaction symptoms, according to Dr. Gupta’s report. In addition, 4 out of 5 patients with an allergy to sesame usually have other food allergies, including peanut allergy, allergy to tree nuts, eggs and cow’s milk. For those with multiple food allergies, it becomes difficult to maintain a well-balanced diet, which may affect adequate nutrition.

What Happens With Exposure to Sesame?

When someone who is allergic to sesame comes in contact with sesame, proteins in the sesame bind to specific IgE antibodies produced by the person’s immune system, leading to a cascade of symptoms, which can range from mild to life-threatening.

This is why it is crucial to get allergy tested if you suspect an allergy to sesame. In the event that skin testing is negative, a follow up blood test should be done to confirm the results. In some cases, depending on the results, a graded, oral-food challenge can be considered.

Avoidance is key and because sesame may not always be listed as an ingredient, look out for Benne, gingelly oil, sesame salt, halvah, sesame oil, sesame paste, sesame salt, sesamol, Sesamum indicum, Sesemolina, Sim sim, Tahini, Tahina, Tehina or Til. Foods that may contain sesame include Asian cuisine (sesame oil is commonly used in cooking), baked goods (such as bagels, bread, breadsticks, hamburger buns and rolls), bread crumbs, cereals, bagel chips, pita chips and tortilla chips, crackers, dipping sauces (such as baba ghanoush, hummus and tahini sauce), dressings, gravies, marinades and sauces, falafel, flavored rice, noodles, risotto, herbs and herbal drinks, margarine, processed meats and sausages, Snack foods (such as pretzels, candy, Halvah, Japanese snack mix and rice cakes), soups, sushi and vegetarian burgers.

In addition, sesame is often found in a number of skin care products, including moisturizers, lipstick, makeup, sunscreen, skin cleansers, and hair products.

With the resumption of school, please make sure that your child’s food allergy action plans are up to date. If you need forms to be filled out, please schedule a follow up appointment with a health care provider in the office so we can get them ready for you and your family.