



Coconut Allergy

Frequently Asked Questions

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Q 1: Is coconut a nut or seed?

The coconut is the fruit (seed) of the coconut palm tree and its white inner flesh can be eaten and the milk drunk. Coconut derived products are added to many foods (including cakes, chocolates and sweets), some infant formula, and cosmetic products.

The coconut is very different from peanuts or tree nuts. The presence of the phrase "nut" in the name does not mean that coconut will trigger an allergic reaction in people allergic to peanut or tree nuts.

Q 2: Is coconut allergy common?

No. Allergic reactions to eating coconut are relatively rare. Contact allergic dermatitis to coconut products is more common. Sensitisation to coconut pollen has been reported.

Only a few cases of allergic reactions from eating coconut products have been reported, including a case of severe stomach upset in a baby fed infant formula containing coconut. The other cases have been severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis). Of these, some have been found to be allergic to tree nuts like walnut and hazelnut, as well as coconut.

Allergic responses have been found to similar proteins present in both types of foods, a concept known as cross-reactivity. Other cases have only been allergic to coconut.

Q 3: When is a test for coconut allergy recommended?

If coconut allergy is suspected, allergy testing may be recommended by a doctor. Test results should always be considered alongside a detailed medical history and physical examination by a doctor who is trained in allergy diagnosis and management.

Q 4: What is contact dermatitis to coconut?

Coconut-derived products (such as coconut diethanolamide, cocamide sulfate, cocamide DEA, and CDEA), can cause contact allergic dermatitis. These can be in cosmetics, hair shampoos, moisturisers, soaps, cleansers and hand wash. As with any contact dermatitis, a rash may arise a day or two after contact with the allergen and take several days to resolve. If contact dermatitis to coconut products is suspected, then patch testing by a trained health professional may be used.

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