

## Coconut Allergy

Allergic reactions to eating coconut are relatively rare, whilst contact allergic dermatitis to coconut products is more common. Sensitisation to coconut pollen has been reported.

### Coconut is a useful food

The coconut palm tree is a native of the tropics. The fruit (seed) of the palm is known as the coconut. The coconut has great economic value, as the outer fibrous husk can be used to make ropes and mats, the white inner flesh can be eaten, and the milk can be drunk. Coconut derived products are also added to:

- Many foods including cakes, chocolates and sweets.
- Some infant formulae.
- Cosmetics, hair shampoos, moisturisers, soaps, cleansers and hand wash.

### Allergies occur to peanut, tree nuts and coconut

Allergic reactions to peanut or tree nuts are relatively common. In contrast, allergic reactions to coconut are relatively rare. Few cases of allergic reactions from eating coconut products have been reported, including one case of severe stomach upset in a baby fed infant formula containing coconut. The other cases reported have been those of severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis). Of these cases, 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.

### Coconut allergy is relatively rare

Coconut is a very different plant from peanut or tree nuts. The presence of the letters "nut" does not mean that coconut will trigger an allergic reaction in people allergic to peanut or tree nuts. Allergies to peanut and tree nuts are relatively common, compared to allergies to coconut, which are very rare. This suggests that the risk of coconut allergy in a person known to be allergic to peanut or tree nuts is very low. Therefore, allergy testing to coconut is not considered as routine.

### 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 present in cosmetics, hair shampoos, moisturisers, soaps, cleansers and hand wash. As with any contact dermatitis, an itchy blistering 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 is an appropriate method for diagnosis.

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