

# Seafood Allergy

In addition to the general information about food allergies, here are some issues that people with a seafood allergy should know about.

## **Fish, crustaceans and shellfish: different allergies**

People with allergies to one type of seafood, like fish, crustaceans (lobster, crab, etc.) and shellfish (oysters, mollusks, etc.), may not be allergic to other kinds of seafood. Studies suggest that seafood allergies tend to fall within groups. In fact, many people are only allergic to a single type of seafood. For example, some people can eat fish safely but react to crustaceans such as crab and lobster. If you're allergic to one type of seafood such as fish, consult your allergist before trying other types, such as crustaceans and shellfish.

## **You don't have to eat seafood to have a reaction**

People with a severe fish, crustacean and shellfish allergy can experience allergic reactions even without eating these foods. Exposure to proteins carried in cooking vapours (such as sizzling fish or steam from a lobster pot), and on dishes used to prepare and present these foods (such as sizzling skillets) have been reported to trigger an allergic reaction.

## **Read the labels**

If you're allergic to any type of seafood (fish, shellfish and crustaceans), the only way to avoid a reaction is to avoid all foods and products that contain the type of seafood that you are allergic to. Don't eat a food or product if the label has precautionary statements such as "may contain seafood". Read ingredient lists carefully and learn to identify other names for seafood, such as kamaboko. Do not consume a food or product if there is no ingredient list or if there is a risk that the product might have been in contact with the seafood that you are allergic to. If there is not enough information to make a decision, you can always call to ask the company or speak to a knowledgeable person at a restaurant.

## **Lifelong seafood allergy**

Crustacean and shellfish allergies predominantly affect adults and are rare among young children. In North America, fish allergies are more predominant in adults, while in countries where fish is a dietary staple, fish allergies are common among both adults and children. Allergies to fish, crustaceans and shellfish are usually lifelong conditions.



## Sources of seafood

### Most common fishes

Anchovy, basa, bass, bluefish, bream, carp, catfish (channel cat, mudcat), char, chub, cisco, cod, eel, flounder, grouper, haddock, hake, halibut, herring, mackerel, mahi-mahi, marlin, monkfish (angler fish, lotte), orange roughy, perch, pickerel (dore, walleye), pike, plaice, pollock, pompano, porgy, rockfish, salmon, sardine, shark, smelt, snapper, sole, sturgeon, swordfish, tilapia (St. Peter's fish), trout, tuna (albacore, bonito), turbot, white fish, whiting.

### Most common crustaceans

Crab, crayfish (crawfish, écrevisse), lobster (langouste, langoustine, coral, tomalley), prawns, shrimp (crevette).

### Most common shellfish

Abalone, clam, cockle, conch, limpets, mussels, octopus, oysters, periwinkle, quahaugs, scallops, land and sea snails (escargot), squid (calamari), whelks.

### Seafood allergies and histamine poisoning (scombroid poisoning)

Although allergic reactions and histamine poisoning can cause similar symptoms, they are different issues. Allergies to fish, crustacean and shellfish proteins cause an allergic person's immune system to react abnormally.

Histamine is produced when some species of fish—such as anchovies, mackerel, mahi-mahi and tuna—decompose. Dangerous levels of histamine can develop when these fish are improperly handled. Histamine is toxic to everyone at high doses. If you experience symptoms such as rash, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, dizziness, burning throat, stomach pain, itchy skin or tingling after consuming these fish, seek emergency medical treatment.

### Other examples of seafood

Caviar and roe (unfertilized fish eggs), kamaboko (imitation crab and lobster meat), surimi (used to make imitation crab and lobster meat), sushi and tarama (salted carp roe).

### Food and products that contain or often contain seafood

Ethnic foods, for example, fried rice, paella and spring rolls  
Garnishes, for example, antipasto, caponata (Sicilian relish)  
Gelatin, marshmallows  
Pizza toppings  
Salad dressings  
Sauces, for example, marinara, Nuoc Mâm, steak and Worcestershire  
Seafood soups and broths  
Spreads, for example, taramasalata  
Sushi (California rolls)

### Other possible sources of seafood

Deli meats, hot dogs (from gelatin)  
Dips, spreads  
Fried foods (from contaminated frying oil)

### Non-food sources of seafood

Compost or fertilizers  
Fish food  
Lip balm, lip gloss  
Pet food

### Fish oil (omega-3)

People who are allergic to fish or other seafoods may not need to avoid fish oil. Fish oils on the market tend to be refined enough to remove all of the proteins that can trigger allergic reactions. However, you should consult your allergist before eating anything made with fish oils.