

5 STEPS

for UNDERSTANDING
FISH ALLERGIES

Fish is an important part of a balanced diet.¹ However, a recent USDA study concluded that 80 to 90 percent of Americans are not consuming enough seafood, and are missing out on all the health benefits fish has to offer.² Fish provides complete lean protein, omega-3 fatty acids and other important nutrients to fuel students and school staff for success.³ Luckily, 99.6% of the population can consume finfish without any problem,⁴ and an allergy to shellfish does not necessarily mean an allergy to finfish. If a student or staff member has been diagnosed with a known fish allergy, however, collaborative efforts should be taken by school staff and parents to help avoid a potential reaction.



1 Less than 1 Percent

Although one of the major food allergens identified by the FDA,⁵ finfish is responsible for allergies in just 0.4% of the population.⁶ Fish allergies are also less common in children than adults.⁷

Following are some helpful tips for navigating the waters of fish allergies:



2 Know Your Fish

If a student or staff member has been diagnosed with a known fish allergy, he or she may be allergic to more than one type of fish. Halibut, salmon, and tuna are most commonly associated with finfish allergies,⁸ but caution should still be taken with all types of fish until the specific allergy has been determined by a medical professional.



3 Recognize the Symptoms

Fish allergies can manifest themselves differently for each person, but the most common symptoms include: hives, flushed skin, tingling or itchiness in the mouth, swelling, vomiting and/or diarrhea.⁹



4 Tips on Avoiding a Reaction

If a student or staff member has been diagnosed with a known fish allergy, the best ways to avoid contact with fish and a possible reaction include: reading food labels, avoiding "cross-contact" with other prepared foods that might contain fish, educating yourself about the early warning signs of an allergic reaction, and seeking treatment immediately if symptoms do occur.¹⁰



5 Not all Fish are Created Equal

An allergy to one fish does not necessarily mean a student or staff member is allergic to all fish.¹¹ It is best to practice caution if a known fish allergy is present, but with proper education and testing, certain types of fish may still be enjoyed for their taste and nutritional benefits.

This document is for educational purposes only. Please direct any questions or suspicions of a fish allergy to a board-certified allergist or trained medical professional. For more information, please see the sources listed to the right, or visit: www.greatfishforgreatkids.org.



Glossary¹²

Fish: Used as a collective term, includes finfish, mollusks, crustaceans and any aquatic animal which is harvested.

Seafood: Any fish caught for human consumption.

Finfish: Fish species with backbones and fins; not including crustaceans, cephalopods or other mollusks.

Shellfish: Shellfish include both mollusks, such as clams and mussels, and crustaceans, such as crabs and lobsters.

Sources

¹ Harvard University T.H. Chan School of Public Health. (2017). *Fish: Friend or Foe?* Retrieved from <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/fish/>

² U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2015). *Consumers Missing Out on Health Benefits of Seafood Consumption*. Retrieved from <https://www.ars.usda.gov/news-events/news/research-news/2015/consumers-missing-out-on-health-benefits-of-seafood-consumption/>

³ Washington State Department of Health. (2017). *Health Benefits of Fish*. Retrieved from <http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Food/Fish/HealthBenefits>

⁴ Food Allergy Research and Education. (2017). *Food Allergy Facts and Statistics for the U.S.* Retrieved from <https://www.foodallergy.org/file/facts-stats.pdf>

⁵ U.S. Food & Drug Administration. (2016). *Food Allergies: What You Need to Know*. Retrieved from <http://www.fda.gov/Food/IngredientsPackagingLabeling/FoodAllergens/ucm079311.htm>

⁶ Op. cit. 4.

⁷ Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Connection Team (FAACT). (2017). *Fish*. Retrieved from http://www.foodallergyawareness.org/foodallergy/food_allergens-11/fish-31/

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Op. cit. 5.

¹⁰ U.S. Food & Drug Administration. (2016). *Frequently Asked Questions about Food Allergies*. Retrieved from <https://www.fda.gov/Food/IngredientsPackagingLabeling/FoodAllergens/ucm530854.htm>

¹¹ Op. cit. 7.

¹² National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. (2006). *NOAA Fisheries Glossary*. Retrieved from <https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st4/documents/FishGlossary.pdf>