

## Allergy to – Soya

### What is soya?

Soya is a food protein derived from the soya bean, which is a legume. Soya beans may be eaten fresh but are more usually dried. They are often called edamame when fresh or frozen.



Soya (also known as soy) is extremely common in Western diets. The beans are ground to make soya flour, which is often found in bread and baked goods. Soya flour can be processed further to make textured vegetable protein (TVP). Soybeans are fermented to produce tofu, which may itself be used in vegetarian prepared foods. Another fermented product is soy sauce. Soya oil is produced and may be found in some margarines and spreads as well as an oil. In addition, soya is an ingredient in many processed foods, usually as soya lecithin or soya concentrate or isolated soya protein, where it is used variously as an emulsifier or stabiliser.

Soya milk is sometimes suggested as an alternative to cow's milk formula where breastfeeding is not possible. However it is not recommended for babies of six months or under. After six months, soya milk may be considered but it is important to seek the advice of a health professional particularly where an infant is susceptible to allergy (either because they have already reacted to a food, or through their family history). Some infants develop allergy to soya once they are exposed to it. A suitable alternative would be an extensively hydrolysed casein formula. It is important to get medical advice on this.

### How common is soya allergy?

Allergy to soya is uncommon in the UK compared with milk, egg, peanut and fish allergy. Some reports suggest that children with soya allergy have a good chance of outgrowing it, but how often this occurs is not clear.

Some people with soya allergy react to other legumes such as peas and lentils and a few are allergic to peanuts. If someone in your family is soya-allergic, a referral to an allergy clinic is important so these possibilities can be addressed through allergy testing.

### The symptoms

Symptoms of soya allergy among children are frequently mild and may simply involve a rash.

More rarely, there may be severe symptoms including breathing difficulties and anaphylaxis. To our knowledge there have been no fatalities triggered by soya in the UK. But in Sweden, soya allergy has been reported as a relatively common cause of life threatening allergic reactions.

### **Pre-packaged foods**

All pre-packaged food sold within the EU must declare major allergens, including the presence of soya, even if they appear in minute quantities.

Because soya can be found in many processed foods, vigilance is needed.

### **Is there a link between milk and soya allergy?**

There is no common protein in soya and cow's milk and therefore no direct link. Soya is potentially as allergenic as cow's milk and therefore if soya milk is fed to an infant who has already been shown to be cow's milk allergic, there is some chance of that child becoming allergic to soya. Most doctors would not recommend the use of soya milk as a suitable alternative to cow's milk for a child who is thought to be susceptible to allergy and would prefer to use an extensively hydrolysed casein formula, which is less allergenic and in most cases tolerated by milk allergic infants. As stated above, soya formulae are not recommended for any child of six months or under.

There is also some evidence that infants who are susceptible to allergy (through their family history) might be at risk of becoming peanut allergic if they are fed soya. More research is needed to confirm or refute this.

### **Shopping tips**

**Baking products** – Soya flour is used extensively in the bakery industry and is present in many types of bread. As fresh bread from bakeries does not carry ingredient lists, it is best to go for pre-packaged bread and check the ingredients. Other foods to watch out for include cakes and biscuits.

**Infant foods** – some may contain soya flour

**Vegetable protein** – Hydrolysed vegetable protein (HVP) and textured vegetable protein (TVP)

**Lecithin** – Lecithin (E322) is an emulsifier normally derived from unrefined soya oil and occasionally from rapeseed oil. Although the risk of a severe reaction to soya lecithin may be



small, we advise soya-allergic people to play safe and avoid it. Soya lecithin has to be labelled under EU Directive.

**Soya oil** – Refined soya oil is likely to be safe for the vast majority of people with soya allergy. It is used in many foods including salad dressings and margarine. Unrefined soya oil would be more risky but this is rarely used.

**Soya sauce** – Also known as soy sauce. This is widely used in Far Eastern recipes and is also commonly used to add a savoury flavour to soups, gravies, stews and sauces.

**Tofu** – Another name for soya bean curd. Tofu is often used as a protein source for vegetarians or others cutting down on meat. Soya bean curd is traditionally used in some stir fries and soups in the Far East.

**Medicines** – Always ask your pharmacist if soya is an ingredient of medicines.

The content of this Fact Sheet has been **Peer Reviewed by Dr. Pamela Ewan, Consultant Allergist, Addenbrooke's Hospital Cambridge**

**Disclaimer** - The information provided in this leaflet is given in good faith. Every effort has been taken to ensure accuracy. All patients are different, and specific cases need specific advice. There is no substitute for good medical advice provided by a medical professional.

**About The Anaphylaxis Campaign** – *“helping people with severe allergies live their lives”*

The Anaphylaxis Campaign is the only UK charity to exclusively meet the needs of the growing numbers of people at risk from severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis) by providing information and support relating to foods and other triggers such as latex, drugs and insect stings. Our focus is on medical facts, food labelling, risk reduction and allergen management. The Campaign offers tailored services for individual, clinical professional and corporate members.

Visit our website [www.anaphylaxis.org.uk](http://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk).