

Celery Allergy – the facts

Celery, botanical name *Apium graveolens*, belongs to the *Apiaceae* family (sometimes called *Umbelliferae*).

The celery plant is composed of a root or tuber, called celeriac, and sticks. Celery was cultivated by the Greeks and Romans and has been widely used both as a food and in medication since The Middle Ages.



Celery is used in food in the forms of sticks, celeriac, leaves, powdered as a spice and celery seeds, which are themselves used to make celery salt. The aromatic flavour means that it is often used in soups, stews, stocks, bouillons and seasonings.

Celeriac may be used in a similar way to potatoes, especially roasted, mashed or to make a gratin and can also be mixed with potatoes to make these. Celeriac can also be eaten raw.

Celery salt is a classic ingredient of a Bloody Mary, and is also used as a seasoning for tomato juice and tomato-based soups and sauces.

Celery root is consumed in a processed form as a cooked vegetable or, in a powdered form, as a spice.

The symptoms

Celery can induce allergic reactions of immediate type, from oral contact urticaria to severe anaphylaxis. Usually the frequency of sensitisation to celeriac is higher than to celery sticks among those patients studied.

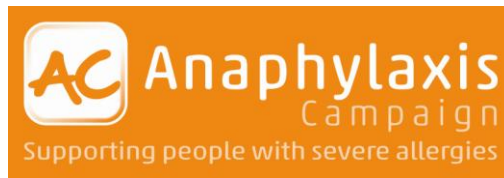
How common is celery allergy?

Celery and celeriac are a frequent cause of food allergy, in some European countries. In Switzerland and France about 30–40% of patients with food allergy have been reported to be sensitised to celeriac (celery root).

Allergy to celeriac is highly associated with birch and mugwort pollen sensitisation.

Celery allergy has figured in numerous scientific reports; most of them, written by European experts, have demonstrated that celery allergy is one of the most common pollen-related food allergies among adults in certain countries such as Switzerland, France and Germany.

Allergy to celeriac (the celery root) is more common than to celery stick, although both can cause severe reactions. Symptoms vary from mild ones, such as oral allergy syndrome, to anaphylactic shock.



Geographical differences are interesting. In Central Europe, a high proportion of people with birch pollen allergy are prone to celery allergy. In Southern Europe celery allergy is most frequently related to mugwort pollen, and in those cases it is potentially more severe.

Thermal processing does not completely deplete the allergenicity of celery, according to reports. For some people allergic reactions to cooked celery will take place, even after high temperatures are used. Particular proteins may be responsible for serious systemic reactions rather than simply oral ones.

Celery allergy is much rarer in the UK and the situation may not be the same as the findings in Europe.

It is worth noting that sometimes in the medical literature celery and celeriac are clearly distinguished and on other occasions the term celery is used for all forms.

Pre-packaged foods

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

The content of this Fact Sheet has been **Peer Reviewed by Dr Michael Radcliffe, Consultant in Allergy Medicine, Royal Free NHS Trust.**

Disclaimer –The information provided in this factsheet 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 – “supporting people with severe allergies”

The Anaphylaxis Campaign is the only UK wide 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