


# Safeguarding Food-Allergic & Food Intolerant Consumers

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The importance of improved allergen & gluten labelling in Canada

April 11, 2007





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Avoidance is the only defence to prevent allergic or celiac reactions.

The Government of Canada is committed to providing safe food for **all** Canadians.

Food labels **must** identify all priority allergens, gluten and sulphites to protect Canadian consumers.



# Agenda

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- Overview of anaphylaxis
- Overview of celiac disease
- History of labelling policy
- Benefits of passing enhanced allergen labelling amendments
- Call-to-action
- Discussion

# What is anaphylaxis?

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## **Anaphylaxis:**

- Is a potentially life-threatening allergic reaction
- Involves several body systems:
  - Skin, upper and lower respiratory, gastrointestinal, cardiovascular
  - Can cause many different symptoms
- May be life-threatening when it affects:
  - **Airway**
  - **Blood circulation**

# Signs and Symptoms

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- **Face:** itching, redness, swelling of face and tongue
- **Airway:** trouble breathing, swallowing or speaking
- **Stomach:** stomach pain, vomiting, diarrhea
- **Total:** hives, rash, itchiness, swelling, weakness, pallor, sense of doom, loss of consciousness

Any of these symptoms may appear.  
Without treatment, **anaphylaxis can be fatal.**

# Food Allergy: *not just nuts*

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<b>Food</b>	<b>Young Children</b>	<b>Adults</b>
Milk	2.5%	0.3%
Egg	1.3%	0.2%
Peanut	0.8%	0.6%
Tree nuts	0.2%	0.5%
Fish	0.1%	0.4%
Shellfish	0.1%	2.0%

H. Sampson, Food Allergy Update, JACI 2004



# Food Allergy in Canada

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- 1.2 million Canadians at risk (based on US estimate)
- Up to 6% of young children (under 3 yrs)
- Peanut allergy has doubled\* in North America in past decade  
(\*Refers to US data)

Food allergy is a growing public health concern.



# Food Allergy: the reality

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- No cure on the horizon
- Strict avoidance is key to preventing an allergic reaction:
  - A small amount can trigger a reaction
  - Cannot tell who is at risk for mild, moderate, or fatal reaction
- Accidents happen despite best efforts:
  - Threat of sudden death without proper treatment



# What is Celiac Disease?

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## **Celiac disease:**

- A genetically based autoimmune disorder caused by “gluten” in wheat, rye and barley
- Can affect several body systems
  - Gastro-intestinal, skin, skeleton, blood, nervous system, reproductive system
- Symptoms can develop at any age
- Acute symptoms sometimes triggered by stress – infection, pregnancy, surgery



# Common Symptoms

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- Symptoms vary greatly in number and severity:
  - Abdominal pain, bloating
  - Anemia
  - Weight loss
  - Extreme exhaustion
  - Bone and joint pain
  - Mouth ulcers
  - Depression
  - Recurrent miscarriages
  - Infertility in both men and women
  - Short stature in children, etc.



# Celiac Disease in Canada

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- 150,000 to 300,000 Canadians at risk (based on new US prevalence)
- Diagnosis is increasing:
  - Greater awareness
  - Celiac disease is not just a “childhood disease”



# Celiac Disease: the reality

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- The only treatment is a strict gluten-free diet – **for life**
- Strict avoidance of gluten reduces risk of serious complications:
  - Osteoporosis
  - Reproductive disorders
  - Lymphoma
  - Possibly other autoimmune diseases



# Avoidance is best defence

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- Individuals with food allergy must avoid their food triggers
- Celiac disease must avoid their food triggers

**We must be able to rely on complete and accurate labels**

# History

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- **1993:** Health Canada begins major revisions of *Food and Drug Regulations*
- **1994:** Scientific review of literature as a basis for priority allergens
- **1999:** *Common Allergenic Foods and Their Labelling in Canada – A Review*, Zarkadas et. al., Canadian Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology
- **2000:** Drafted proposed amendments to *Food and Drug Regulations*
- **2004:** Amendments were top priority
- **2007:** *Where do things stand?*



# Benefits to Consumers/Families

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- Enhanced food labelling will:
  - Save lives and alleviate suffering
  - Reduce inadvertent reactions
  - Improve quality of life
  - Develop confidence in food products
  - Increase array of safe food choices
  - Reduce effects of limited diets



# Benefits to Food Industry

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- Enhanced food labelling will:
  - Save lives and alleviate suffering
  - Build confidence/brand loyalty:
    - Minimize inquiries and concerns
  - Ensure standards are met by entire food industry
  - Reduce product recalls
  - Take the guess work out of current labelling decisions
  - Allows industry to be globally competitive





# Benefits to Government

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- Enhanced food labelling will:
  - Save lives and alleviate suffering
  - Reduce healthcare costs
  - Provide Canadian Food Inspection Agency with standard and consistent regulations to follow
  - Reduce recalls
  - Regain confidence of key stakeholders
  - Finalize the priority allergen labelling file
  - Catch up with our global trading partners

# Call-to-Action

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- Prioritize allergen labelling:
  - Prepare legislation for publication in Gazette I by September 2007
  - Commit resources for resolving comments within 90 day period

**Legislate labelling of priority allergens and gluten sources**

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