



A safe, private place to get doctor-approved information on health, emotions, and life.

---

## Shellfish Allergy

### What Is a Shellfish Allergy?

A shellfish allergy is not exactly the same as a seafood allergy. Seafood includes fish (like tuna or cod) and shellfish (like lobster or clams). Even though they both fall into the category of "seafood," fish and shellfish are biologically different. So fish will not cause an allergic reaction in someone with a shellfish allergy, unless that person also has a fish allergy.

Shellfish fall into two different groups:

- **crustaceans**, like shrimp, crab, or lobster
- **mollusks**, like clams, mussels, oysters, scallops, octopus, or squid

Some people with shellfish allergies are allergic to both groups, but some are allergic only to one.

Most allergic reactions to shellfish happen when someone eats shellfish. But sometimes a person can react to touching shellfish or breathing in vapors from cooking shellfish.

Shellfish allergy can develop at any age. Even people who have eaten shellfish in the past can develop an allergy. Some people outgrow certain food allergies over time, but those with shellfish allergies usually have the allergy for the rest of their lives.

### What Are the Signs & Symptoms of a Shellfish Allergy?

When someone is allergic to shellfish, the body's immune system, which normally fights infections, overreacts to proteins in the shellfish. Every time the person eats (or, in some cases, handles or breathes in) shellfish, the body thinks these proteins are harmful invaders and releases chemicals like histamine. This can cause symptoms such as:

- wheezing
- trouble breathing
- coughing
- hoarseness
- throat tightness
- belly pain
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- itchy, watery, or swollen eyes
- hives
- red spots
- swelling
- a drop in blood pressure, causing lightheadedness or loss of consciousness (passing out)

Allergic reactions to shellfish can differ. Sometimes the same person can react differently at different times. Some reactions can be very mild and involve only one system of the body, like hives on the skin. Other reactions can be more severe and involve more than one part of the body.

Shellfish allergy can cause a severe reaction called **anaphylaxis**, even if a previous reaction was mild. Anaphylaxis might start with some of the same symptoms as a less severe reaction, but can quickly get worse. The person may have trouble breathing or pass out. More than one part of the body might be involved. If it isn't treated, anaphylaxis can be life-threatening.

### How Is an Allergic Reaction to Shellfish Treated?

If you have a shellfish allergy (or any kind of serious food allergy), the doctor will want you to carry an **epinephrine auto-injector** in case of an emergency.

An epinephrine auto-injector is a prescription medicine that comes in a small, easy-to-carry container. It's easy to use. Your doctor will show you how. Keep it nearby, not in a locker or in the nurse's office.

The doctor can also give you an allergy action plan, which helps you prepare for, recognize, and treat an allergic reaction. Share the plan with anyone else who needs to know, such as relatives, school officials, and coaches. Also consider wearing a medical alert bracelet.

**Every second counts in an allergic reaction.** If you start having serious allergic symptoms, like swelling of the mouth or throat or trouble breathing, use the epinephrine auto-injector right away. Also use it right away if your symptoms involve two different parts of the body, like hives with vomiting. Then **call 911** and have someone take you to the emergency room. You need to be under medical supervision because even if the worst seems to have passed, a second wave of serious symptoms can happen.

It's also a good idea to carry an over-the-counter (OTC) antihistamine, as this can help treat mild allergy symptoms. Use antihistamines after — not as a replacement for — the epinephrine shot during life-threatening reactions.

### What Else Should I Know?

If allergy testing shows that you have a shellfish allergy, you must not eat shellfish. You also must not eat any foods that might contain shellfish as ingredients. Anyone who is sensitive to the smell of cooking shellfish should avoid restaurants and other areas where shellfish is being cooked.

For information on foods to avoid, check sites such as the Food Allergy Research and Education network (FARE).

Always read food labels to see if a food contains shellfish. Manufacturers of foods sold in the United States must state whether foods contain any of the top eight most common allergens, including **crustacean shellfish**. The label should list "shellfish" in the ingredient list or say "Contains shellfish" after the list.

Some foods look OK from the ingredient list, but while being made they can come in contact with fish. This is called **cross-contamination**. Look for advisory statements such as "May contain fish," "Processed in a facility that also processes fish," or "Manufactured on equipment also used for fish." Not all companies label for cross-contamination, so if in doubt, call or email the company to be sure.

Manufacturers also do not have to list **mollusk shellfish ingredients** because mollusk shellfish (clams, mussels, oysters, or scallops) are not considered a major food allergen. When labels say a food contains shellfish, they refer to crustacean shellfish. Contact the company to see about cross-contamination risk with mollusks.

Cross-contamination often happens in restaurants. In kitchens, shellfish can get into a food product because the staff use the same surfaces, utensils (like knives, cutting boards, or pans), or oil to prepare both shellfish and other foods.

This is particularly common in seafood restaurants, so some people find it safer to avoid these restaurants. Shellfish is also used in a lot of Asian cooking, so there's a risk of cross-contamination in Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, or Japanese restaurants. When eating at restaurants, it may be best to avoid fried foods because many places cook chicken, French fries, and shellfish in the same oil.

When eating away from home, make sure you have an epinephrine auto-injector with you and that it hasn't expired. Also, tell the people preparing or serving your food about the shellfish allergy. Sometimes, you may want to bring food with you that you know is safe. Don't eat at the restaurant if the chef, manager, or owner seems uncomfortable with your request for a safe meal.

Also talk to the staff at school about cross-contamination risks for foods in the cafeteria. It may be best to pack lunches at home so you can control what's in them.

Other things to keep in mind:

- Make sure the epinephrine auto-injector is always on hand and that it is not expired.
- Don't eat cooked foods you didn't make yourself or anything with unknown ingredients.
- Tell everyone who handles your food — from relatives to restaurant staff — that you have a shellfish allergy.
- Stay away from steam tables or stovetops when shellfish is cooked (especially places where food is cooked on a communal grill, like hibachi restaurants).

- Carry a personalized "chef card," which can be given to the kitchen staff. The card details your allergies for food preparers. Food allergy websites provide printable chef card forms in many different languages.
- Shellfish ingredients also might be used in some non-food products, like nutritional supplements, lip gloss, pet foods, and plant fertilizer. Talk to your doctor if you have questions about what is safe.

**Reviewed by:** Stephen F. Dinetz, MD

Date reviewed: August 2018

---

Note: All information on TeensHealth® is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

© 1995-2021 The Nemours Foundation. All rights reserved.

Images provided by The Nemours Foundation, iStock, Getty Images, Veer, Shutterstock, and Clipart.com.

# Shellfish Allergy

Post Test – February 2022

**Please keep this test and certificate in your files for Licensing.  
You do not need to send it in to our office or the State.**

1. A shellfish allergy is exactly the same as a seafood allergy.  
True or False?
2. Shellfish fall into two different groups: \_\_\_\_\_ like shrimp, crab or lobster and \_\_\_\_\_ like clams, mussels, oysters, scallops, octopus or squid.
3. When someone is allergic to shellfish, the body's \_\_\_\_\_, which normally fights infection, overreacts to proteins in the shellfish.
4. Shellfish allergy can cause a severe reaction called \_\_\_\_\_, even if a previous reaction was mild.
5. If you have a shellfish allergy (or any kind of serious food allergy), the doctor will want you to carry an \_\_\_\_\_ auto-injector.
6. If your doctor gives you an allergy action plan, you should share it with anyone who needs to know, such as relatives, school officials and coaches.  
True or False?
7. Some foods look OK from the ingredient list, but while being made they can come in contact with fish. This is called \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Cross-contamination often happens in \_\_\_\_\_ via surfaces, utensils or oil used to prepare both shellfish and other foods.
9. When eating at restaurants, it may be best to avoid \_\_\_\_\_ because many places cook chicken, French fries and shellfish in the same oil.
10. Shellfish also might be used in some \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ products, like nutritional supplements, lip gloss, pet foods and plant fertilizer.

January 2022 Quiz Answers. 1.Health 2. Kids/Teens 3.False 4.Measurement  
5.Diabetes 6.Asthma 7.True 8.Inflammation 9.Energy 10.Depressed



Southwest Human Development Services

P.O. Box 28487 • Austin, Texas 78755-8487

(512) 467-7916 • Toll Free (800) 369-9082

Fax (512) 467-1453 • Toll Free (888) 467-1455

[www.swhuman.org](http://www.swhuman.org)

## **SOUTHWEST HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

Sponsor of the

## **USDA CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM**

is pleased to award

---

THIS CERTIFICATE

for completion of 30 minutes of training in

### **February 2022: Shellfish Allergy**

A SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL COURSE

(Quiz on reverse side must be completed for certificate to be valid)

This Family Day Care Provider supports the commitment to  
Quality Child Care as demonstrated by completion of this course

Given this date \_\_\_\_\_

Elizabeth Curtis  
Training Coordinator  
Southwest Human Development Services