

ORAL ALLERGY SYNDROME

What is Oral Allergy Syndrome?

Oral allergy syndrome is an allergic reaction to certain proteins in a variety of fruits, vegetables, and nuts. This syndrome occurs in some people with pollen allergies. Symptoms usually affect the mouth and throat. These reactions are not related to pesticides, metals or other substances.

Who is affected and what pollens are involved?

Most people who have oral allergy syndrome also have seasonal allergies (hay fever). Older children and adults are the most likely to have this syndrome. You have a higher risk of this syndrome if you are allergic to the pollens of:

- Birch Tree
- Grass
- Ragweed
- English Plantain (weed)
- Mugwort (sage)

These reactions can occur at any time of the year. However, symptoms may be worse during the pollen season.

What are the symptoms and when do they occur?

Symptoms typically include itching and burning of the lips, mouth and throat. Some people also have watery, itchy eyes, runny nose, and sneezing. Sometimes peeling or touching the foods may result in a rash, itching or swelling where the juice touches the skin. Occasionally, reactions may lead to hives and swelling of the mouth, throat and airway. In rare cases, severe allergic reactions have been reported such as vomiting, diarrhea, asthma, generalized hives, and anaphylactic shock. Symptoms usually develop within minutes of eating, drinking or touching the fresh/raw food. Occasionally, symptoms occur more than an hour later.

Are all reactions to fruits and vegetables associated with oral allergy syndrome?

No. A variety of fruits, vegetables and their juices (including orange, tomato, apple and grape) sometimes cause skin rashes and diarrhea. This is especially true in young children.

Strawberries occasionally cause hives. If you are allergic to nuts, you could get hives, a rash or even anaphylaxis. These same reactions can sometimes come from eating fruits and vegetables.

What Foods are Involved

Foods associated with birch, grass, ragweed, English plantain, and mugwort pollens are listed below. Most reactions are caused by raw foods. This is because the proteins that cause allergies are usually destroyed by cooking. The main exceptions to this are celery and nuts, which may cause reactions even after being cooked. Some plant parts (ex. The skin) may be more allergenic than others.

Birch Allergy: apple, cherry, pear, peach, plum, prune, nectarine, apricot, kiwi, carrot, celery, potato, tomato, spinach, parsnip, green pepper, lentils, peas, beans, peanut, parsley, anise, dill, fennel, caraway, cumin, wheat, buckwheat, almond, hazelnut, walnut

Grass Allergy: cherry, orange, kiwi, melon, watermelon, potato, tomato, peanut

Ragweed Allergy: banana, cantaloupe, honeydew, chamomile, cucumber, zucchini, sunflower seed

English Plantain Allergy: melon

Mugwort Allergy: apple, melon, watermelon, anise, coriander, cumin, fennel, celery, carrot

Latex Allergy: avocado, banana, chestnut, kiwi, carrot, potato, tomato, apple, celery, papaya, melons

What can sensitive individuals do to avoid a reaction?

If you get a rash, itching or swelling when touching or peeling these foods, wear gloves. This will help prevent the foods from touching your skin.

Consume the foods that cause you symptoms **ONLY** in the cooked form. The exception to this is nuts, which usually cause symptoms whether raw or cooked. Nuts tend to pose a higher risk. Avoid nuts completely if there is any reason you believe you are allergic to them.