

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

April 7, 2006

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776

e-mail:makeith@ifas.ufl.edu

Is It an Allergy?

The paper said a few days ago that the allergy season is just about over, because the flowers are starting to bloom. If that's true, it will be a real blessing to the poor folks suffering from red eyes, stuffed up heads, runny noses and all the other symptoms of pollen allergies. On the other hand, a lot of what some people call "food allergy" is a food intolerance, not a real allergy. That's not saying that they aren't real. Food intolerances or sensitivities are very real, very uncomfortable, and may even be life threatening. But if it doesn't involve our immune system it's not really an allergy.

For example, many people say they are "allergic to milk". They get gas, cramps and diarrhea if they drink a glass of the white stuff. The reaction happens because they can't digest milk sugar. Bacteria in their intestines digest it, and create lots of gas in the process. That's an intolerance, a very uncomfortable one, but it's not really an allergy because their immune system is not upset.

Only about 8% of children and 4% of adults suffer from food allergies. Most adults have had their allergies since they were children. A few people do become allergic as adults. Seafood is the main food allergy that shows up in adults. And thankfully, many children outgrow their allergies as they age.

The part of a food that irritates our immune system is always protein. Most of the foods that cause allergies are high in protein. The top causes of food allergies are: milk protein (mostly in children), shellfish (mostly in adults), peanuts, tree nuts (walnuts, cashews, etc.), eggs, soybeans, wheat and strawberries. Allergies to soy and soy

products do seem to be increasing, probably because so many more soy products are being used in foods now. Peanut allergies are the most dangerous, because they can kill someone in minutes.

These are the main foods, but there are other related plants that might also cause problems. People who are allergic to wheat must also avoid rye and barley. The protein in them is very much like wheat protein, so our bodies react to all three foods.

Sometimes the allergies show up in things that are not food. People with very bad ragweed or pollen allergies often can not drink camomile tea or eat cantaloupe, especially during ragweed season. The camomile plant is very closely related to ragweed. So breathing the pollen from one plant and drinking the tea from another both cause reactions. And cantaloupe has similar proteins too.

Another food and non-food set of allergens (things that cause allergies) are those related to latex. Nurses, restaurant workers, even child care workers who have to use plastic gloves a lot sometimes become allergic to latex gloves. Latex is made from sap of the rubber tree. It has proteins in it. Unfortunately those proteins are very much like some proteins in foods.

People who become allergic to latex often discover that suddenly they can't eat strawberries. Or people react to peaches, find they can't eat kiwi, melons or papaya either, and then the plastic gloves start to bother them too. All of these foods have very similar proteins. Other foods with the same proteins include avocados, bananas, chestnuts and potatoes. They certainly don't look alike, but inside, their proteins are too much alike for our comfort!

This week's recipe is a super-quick and easy, low fat, low sugar sweet potato pie. If you like a firm pie, use undiluted evaporated skim milk. (If you're allergic to milk or

