

ORAL ALLERGY SYNDROME

What is oral allergy syndrome (OAS)?

This is the term given to an allergic condition in which people have symptoms of itching and swelling of the mouth, tongue and soft palate after eating raw fruit, vegetables and some nuts, but when the cooked food is eaten e.g. in a dessert, as jam, or canned, no symptoms occur. People who also experience symptoms to cooked fruits or fruit juices have a more severe type of allergy to fruits and vegetables.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms are usually a feeling of intense itchiness or tingling in the lips, mouth and soft palate confined to the mouth, although some people also experience local swelling in the mouth. Severe symptoms are very rare but a small number of patients with this condition can experience reactions which are not just confined to the mouth such as, urticaria (nettle rash), wheeze, angio-oedema or abdominal pain.

What can be done?

Most people who suffer from OAS suffer from hay fever symptoms (itchy eyes/nose, runny eyes/nose, sneezing) between February and July for a number of years before developing this condition. The symptoms are caused by a reaction to plant proteins which are similar to those in pollen. These proteins are usually destroyed when heated which is why people who suffer from OAS can usually safely eat cooked or canned fruits or vegetables.

All raw foods which cause symptoms should be avoided. Lightly cooked foods, e.g. dishes which include stir fried vegetables or steamed/poached fruits or vegetables, may also cause a reaction and if they do, they too should be avoided. If your symptoms are not just in your mouth you may also need to be careful with cooked foods and should consult your specialist for further advice. If your OAS trigger foods include nuts, these should be avoided in both their raw and roasted state.

Which foods are involved?

Most people with OAS are sensitive to one or two foods, although some will find they may develop problems with a number of the foods listed below. People who have hay fever from February to May are usually allergic only to tree pollen and are more likely to only react to fruits

and some nuts such as hazelnuts. People who have hay fever from March to the end of July are probably allergic to both grass and tree pollen and are not only more likely to develop OAS, but also will be potentially allergic to a much wider range of foods including fruits, vegetables, tree nuts and peanuts. There is at present, no way to predict who will develop a problem with any particular food.

How can you be tested for OAS?

As there is a link with grass and tree pollens, an allergy skin test to these may be performed. Skin testing for the foods may not be helpful as some of the allergens may be destroyed in the process of producing the test solutions, just as they are in cooking. Skin testing using raw food, may be useful to confirm the diagnosis of OAS. If you have been diagnosed with OAS and are worried about eating other foods you can safely test them for yourself at home by rubbing them on the outside and then the inside of your lip. If you feel no tingling or itchiness or swelling then take a bite, chew well and spit it out and wait for 15 minutes to see whether you get any symptoms you recognize. Only perform this testing if your normal symptoms are mild and only involve your mouth. If your symptoms usually include either swelling, wheeze or abdominal pain then you must not test any food except under medical supervision.

Common foods which may cause OAS:

Apple	Carrot
Walnut	Cherries
Peach	Potato
Peanuts	Plum
Pear	Fennel
Wheat	Honey
Nectarine	Spinach
Hazelnuts	Almonds
Strawberries	Brazil nut
Celery	Apricots
Melon	Celery
Watermelon	Spices e.g. cumin, coriander,
Parsley	Cucumber
Tomato	Camomile tea
Swiss chard	

NB: Only the foods identified by the patient and clinic are to be avoided and not all the foods on the list.