

BSACI

Improving Allergy Care through education, training and research

Pollen Food Syndrome

Pollen Food Syndrome, also known as oral allergy syndrome, is a common food allergy that affects adults and school children. This allergy is most common in people who have allergic rhinitis (hay fever) caused by tree or grass pollen. An allergic reaction happens because pollen antibodies recognise and react to similar proteins in fruits, tree nuts, peanuts, soy, and occasionally in vegetables. This condition affects 2% of the adult population in the UK; up to 70% of adults and 40% of children with hay fever could have PFS.

Symptoms of PFS occur within 5-15 minutes after eating the culprit food and are usually limited to the mouth. The most common symptoms are itching and tingling in the mouth and/or throat, mild swelling of the lips, and occasionally of the throat. Other symptoms can include ear itching, a slight rash around the mouth, abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting. Some people experience itchy hands, itchy/watering eyes or sneezing when preparing raw vegetables.

More severe symptoms can occur, such as breathing difficulties or swelling of the throat, but this is rare. This might happen when large amounts of the triggering food have been eaten, such as smoothies, fresh fruit juice, or soya milk.

Trigger foods are usually raw or uncooked fruit, raw tree nuts/peanuts, or occasionally raw vegetables. These include apples, stone fruits, kiwifruit, carrot, celery, potatoes, soya milk, peanuts, hazelnut, almonds, and walnuts. Some people react to only one or two foods, but other people can react to a wide range of foods.

The diagnosis of PFS can often be made from the history of symptoms and foods involved. Sometimes, allergy tests may be required.

The main management is avoidance of only the trigger foods. These may be tolerated when cooked or processed. Peeled and de-seeded raw fruit and vegetables may lessen or stop symptoms from developing. Wearing gloves when preparing food prevents itching of the hands.

If symptoms occur, they may be very mild and disappear without treatment. Drinking water can help but if symptoms persist or involve swelling of the lips, tongue, or throat, then an antihistamine should be taken. Rare symptoms such as throat closure or difficulty in breathing may require adrenaline.

Further information on Pollen Food Syndrome can be found at [Diagnosis and management of Pollen Food Syndrome/Oral Allergy Syndrome - BSACI](#)