



Dr. Ahmed Ahmed, MD, FRCPC, FAAAAI
Master's degree in Allergy (UK)
7 Kakulu Rd, Kanata, ON, K2L 2L4
Phone: (613) 271-1110
Fax: (613) 271-1114
www.doctorahmed.ca

Pollen Food Syndrome (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/or 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 (especially when eating peanut, tree nut or celery) can experience reactions which are not just confined to the mouth such as hives, wheeze, angioedema 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 April and August 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 especially the Birch tree. 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. 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 (especially Birch), an allergy skin test to these may be performed. Skin testing for the food using the standardized extract 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, Pineapple, Avocado, Mango, Carrot, Walnut, Cherries, Peach, Potato, Peanuts, Plum, Pear, Fennel, Wheat, Nectarine, Spinach, Hazelnuts, Almonds, Strawberries, Brazil nut, Celery, Apricots, Melon, Celery, Watermelon, Spices like cumin, Parsley, Cucumber, Tomato and Camomile tea.

Remember that only the fresh/raw form of the foods identified to cause symptoms are to be avoided and not all the foods on the list.

You can find this hand out among other allergy info on my website: www.doctorahmed.ca