



Five Mistakes I have Made Living With My Peanut Allergy!

Mistakes

I am often asked many questions about living with a peanut allergy. One question that is not asked too often, but I think is important to share is **mistakes that I have made** in living with my peanut allergy.

We can all learn from one another and hopefully sharing these experiences will be helpful. Many of these mistakes were *made in my younger years*, but important life lessons. I find that it is good to remember how important it is to keep your guard up and be safe and not only just after having an anaphylactic reaction. Ever since I was prescribed an Epi-Pen I always have two with me at all times.

1. Not fully reading food labels of ALL foods every time.

In 2007, I bought a product I had often eaten, Skinny Cow Vanilla Ice Cream Sandwich.....or so I thought. On a quick trip to my local grocery store I picked up what I thought was the product that I had eaten on occasion for several years. One night after dinner I asked my husband if he wanted to have one, he did not. I took out the product from my freezer and quickly took a bite. Right away I started to get a tingly sensation in my mouth and it started to itch. I knew this product had peanuts in it. I was puzzled and looked again at the label and noted in a very light yellow lettering it said Peanut Butter, but the ice cream was white. This was a new flavor for Skinny Cow, but I was not aware of it and I saw what I thought was the product I knew to be safe. I threw up whatever product I had eaten then my husband drove me to the local emergency room, epi-pen in hand. Once we arrived, they gave me an IV, more epinephrine, steroids, and monitored me for several hours. Luckily, I survived this mistake with the help of emergency treatment.

A few days later, I took the time to contact Skinny Cow to let them know of my mistake and suggest that they make their labeling a bit clearer to clearly show that it was Peanut Butter. They responded by providing me with free product coupons. Since 2007, the product packaging has changed and the peanut version is not just white, but Chocolate Peanut Butter. Not sure that this really had anything to do with my comment, but it is important to provide feedback to manufacturers as I didn't want anyone else to do the same thing I had done.

Thoroughly check the product label every time. If I had, this allergic reaction would not have happened!

2. Not checking with the airline about serving peanuts before I flew



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When I was a teenager, I flew on Southwest to see my sister who was living in Birmingham, Alabama. On the way back, I had a night flight. It was late and the attendants were offering peanuts for the snack. I politely declined due to my allergy. A few minutes after everyone was opening their little bags of peanuts I started wheezing and having trouble breathing. I couldn't understand what was happening until I thought about it some more. This plane was flying all day with hundreds of bags of peanuts being opened. The airborne peanut protein was making me have trouble breathing. I administered my emergency inhaler and told the flight attendant I needed to sit in the back of the plane away from all of the passengers until we landed. The stress of having trouble breathing and being on an airplane led me to change my flying practices from then on. Now, I pick airlines that do not serve peanuts and notify the airline ahead of time. This had been an ongoing issue. I love to travel and one day will share more of my travel adventures with my peanut allergy.

The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network has more information on this topic.

www.foodallergy.org/page/tips-for-airline-travelers-with-food-allergywww.foodallergy.org/page/dot-proposal

PLAN AHEAD when traveling! If I had, this allergic reaction would not have happened!

3. Not checking ingredients with good friends about food they are serving

I am a lucky girl. I have a great group of friends that I have known since my childhood, many I have known for over 30 years. When one of my good friends, Margo, was going to Physical Therapy School abroad, there was a going away party at her parent's house. A few of my friends had baked food for the party. All of my childhood friends know about my peanut allergy so I did not think to ask about the safety of the food that was made. My friends had looked out for me in the past making sure foods were safe to eat. I saw a cookie that was tan and thought it was just a homemade cookie. You know how some cookies are just the right size that you can almost put the whole thing in your mouth at once? Well, that is what I did. I ate the cookie and immediately I spit it out and heard my friend, Beth, state that they were supposed to tell me not to eat those because they contained peanut butter chocolate chips which blended in with the rest of the cookie color. Luckily, my friend's dad is in the medical field and I survived that reaction!

If you have a food allergy ALWAYS ask about the safety of food BEFORE eating it! If I had, this allergic reaction would not have happened!

4. Not telling co-workers about your food allergy and emergency plan

When you are an adult, you are responsible for yourself. It is my job to protect myself from my deadly peanut allergy. In my younger years, I did not always educate co-workers on my allergy and about my emergency plan or how to administer my Epi-Pen if I could not do it. In recent years, I have educated co-workers about my peanut allergy, how and when to administer my epi-pen, and where I keep my epi-pens. I will use the epi-pen trainer in this training and often provide written information about my food allergy.

Inform, Educate, & Train those you work with or spend time with. You never know when you may have an allergic reaction!

5. Not administering my Epi-Pen and going directly to the emergency room

As a child I did not have much education about my food allergy and did not get an Epi-Pen until I was an adult. When I was much younger, I once had an allergic reaction while eating out and did not go to the emergency room when I should have. With a life threatening allergy, you should ALWAYS seek emergency

treatment when you have a reaction after administering your epinephrine. My boyfriend at the time (now husband) and I were visiting his cousins in San Diego, California. We went out to eat in Old Town and I had informed the waitress about my peanut allergy. She stated my order would be free of my allergen. The restaurant had printed on their menu that they used peanut butter in their enchilada sauce. I felt good about my order after my discussions with the waitress and the fact that the restaurant disclosed on their menu that they used peanut butter in a sauce that most people wouldn't think of. I took one very small bite of my burrito and immediately the reactions set-in, itchy throat, nausea, etc. I asked what was in my food and she apologized that they must of not made my order correctly. I went to the bathroom, got sick, and rinsed out my mouth which still felt a bit itchy. I should have administered an Epi-Pen and went to the closest Emergency Room via ambulance. A young, stupid decision to not do this. I returned to the table and was very uncomfortable and not feeling well while everyone else finished their meal. They asked me if I was ok and I said yes. For approximately, 4-6 hours after the allergic reaction I was still not feeling well.

If life threatening food allergy, administer your epinephrine and always seek emergency care after allergic reaction! This mistake could of cost me my life.

It is important to learn from our own mistakes and the mistakes of others. Mistakes with life threatening food allergies can be deadly. If you suffer from a deadly allergy please don't repeat my mistakes!